LONDON LIFE

LONDON LIFE

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS
AND NINE SCENES

by

ARNOLD BENNETT

and

EDWARD KNOBLOCK

Authors of 'Milestones'

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1924

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CHARACTERS

SIMON BLACKSHAW

MARIA BLACKSHAW

DORIS (their daughter)

CAPTAIN MAURICE OPLETREE

ORIANA OPLETREE

MAJOR THE HON. ARTHUR RIGGS-FALKINER
(later Lord Plinlimmon)

HOWARD NATHAN

EDGAR DART

GEORGIE DREAM

WINFRED HOLYOKE

EZRA PIDDUCK

LADY CONINGSBY

SCAIFE

STONE

HAYWARD

MARSHAL

BRUNTON

BARMAN

BUTLER

MAID

BOOTS

POLICEMAN

GUESTS, SINGERS, DANCERS, MUSICIANS,
WAITERS

ACT I

SCENE I

The office of Simon Blackshaw, Bursley.
An afternoon in October.

SCENE II

The Court of the White Horse Inn, Ipswich.
A morning, a few days later.

SCENE III

The Drawing-Room at Hillcrest, Opletree's House near Mistley, Essex.
An afternoon in April, six months later.

ACT II

SCENE I

The Terrace of the House of Commons. Five o'clock on a May afternoon, eleven years later.

SCENE II

Blackshaw's Office, Dover Street.
Seven o'clock of the same day.

SCENE III

The Gallery at Mrs. Opletree's House, Carlton Gardens. Late the same night.

ACT III

SCENE I

Blackshaw's Room at the Colonial Office.
Four o'clock in June, a year later.

SCENE II

The grounds of Nathan's House at Coombe.
Eleven o'clock the same night.

SCENE III

Blackshaw's Drawing-Room, Eaton Place.
Ten o'clock at night. Four months later.

CAST OF THE PLAY

as produced at The Theatre Royal, Drury Lane,
London, 3rd June, 1924

Simon Blackshaw	MR. HENRY AINLEY
Maria Blackshaw	MISS MARY JERROLD
Doris (Act I)	MISS GABRIELLE CASARTELLI
Doris (Acts II & III)	MISS HELEN SPENCER
Capt. Maurice Opletree	MR. EDMUND BREON
Oriana Opletree	MISS LILIAN BRAITHWAITE
Major the Hon. Arthur Riggs-Falkiner (Later Lord Plinlimmon)	MR. GRAHAM BROWNE
Howard Nathan	MR. FRANK COCHRANE
Edgar Dart	MR. IAN HUNTER
Georgie Dream	MISS OLIVE SLOANE
Winfred Holyoke	MR. HERBERT VIBART
Ezra Pidduck	MR. J. H. ROBERTS
Lady Coningsby	MISS KATE PHILLIPS
Scaife	MR. CLIFFORD MOLLISON
Stone	MR. GORDON HARKER
Hayward	MR. ARTHUR PAGE
Marshal	MR. D. A. CLARKE-SMITH
Brunton	MISS GWYNNE WHITBY
Barman	MR. LAWRENCE BASKCOMB
Butler	MR. D. A. CLARKE-SMITH
Policeman	MR. CLIFFORD MORRISON
Maid	MISS NANCY GIRLING

The Play produced by BASIL DEAN

ACT I

ACT I

Scene I

The office of Simon Blackshaw, *Bursley.*

(*Note.—Right and left are from the point of view of the actor.*)

A door at the back centre, a fire-place right, and left a bay-window looking down upon a street in Bursley of the Five Towns.

It is about six o'clock of an October afternoon and the street lamps are lighted.

The office is fitted up in a simple, solid business-like way with the usual mid-Victorian furniture of a solicitor's office. The electric lights are burning.

Pidduck, *a man of forty, thin, timid, prim, prematurely set in his ways, is seated at the large writing table.* Scaife, *a burly, rubicund man of fifty stands facing* Pidduck, *his legs apart, impatiently balancing on his toes.*

Scaife. Yes, that's all mighty fine, Pidduck. You're sitting there in Blackshaw's chair a bit larger than life—

Pidduck (*grandly*). I have Mr. Blackshaw's instructions to occupy his room during his absence; and moreover—

Scaife. But what I want to know is, when's Blackshaw coming back—to attend to his old clients himself?

PIDDUCK (*pompously soothing*). And don't I tell you I don't know. Perhaps to-morrow. Perhaps to-day. Mr. Blackshaw's business in London is of the greatest importance. Several crucial matters with Stanway and Stanway our London agents, not to mention the Local Government Board—

SCAIFE. He's getting above himself, *he* is. Seems like yesterday he was a cheeky little office-boy at What's-their-name's, and now he's—

PIDDUCK (*impressively*). Now he's the biggest solicitor in Bursley, Mr. Scaife; biggest in the Five Towns, I *might* say.

SCAIFE. You *might* say he's the Almighty's younger brother.

(Blackshaw's *voice is heard outside:* "*Mr. Pidduck in here?*" Pidduck *springs up from the chair and opens the door. Losing all his self-importance, he is transformed into the faithful, humble servitor.* Simon Blackshaw *enters. He is a man of thirty-six, of immense vitality.*

BLACKSHAW. Hello, Scaife! How are you? (*Shakes hands.*) (*To* Pidduck *curtly.*) Take my coat. (*To* Scaife.) Does one good to shake a Staffordshire hand after London.

SCAIFE (*mollified*). Ay! That's right. How goes it?

BLACKSHAW. Sorry I'm late for you.

SCAIFE. Why! Did ye know I was coming?

BLACKSHAW. No! But I like to be about when an old client wants me. (*To* Pidduck.)

That'll do, Pidduck. (*Exit* Pidduck *quickly and obsequiously.*) Now my friend (*opens his dispatch-case*), you'll do me a good turn if you tell me what's amiss in just three words. I've got a rush of work, and no one knows better than you what that means. Friend to friend.

SCAIFE. Very well. Smoke nuisance. Two words.

BLACKSHAW. Your chimney ?

SCAIFE (*shakes his head impatiently*). Belfield's.

BLACKSHAW (*absently*). Old Jack's. That new kiln of his, I suppose. Right on your office ?

SCAIFE (*admiringly*). You've got it. Thickest smoke you ever saw—right into my face at my desk. Look like a nigger after half an hour. Besides consumption—it'll give me smoke on lungs. I've talked to him. " Look here, Mr. Belfield," I said. " Your smoke impinges on my office," I said.

BLACKSHAW. What did he say ?

SCAIFE. " Impinges," he says, " My smoke! You wait till you get to hell," he says. " You'll know what smoke is then." I'll begin proceedings against him to-morrow.

BLACKSHAW (*persuasively*). I shouldn't.

SCAIFE. Why not ?

BLACKSHAW. Never go to law, old friend. It's the devil. I tell you as a lawyer.

SCAIFE. Ay! That's sense. That's sense. But—

BLACKSHAW. Look here. I'll see Belfield myself to-morrow. (*Lightly.*) This little trouble must be settled amicably. (*He rises.*)

SCAIFE (*rising, somewhat uncertain*). Yes, but if he won't—

BLACKSHAW (*quickly, as he notices* Scaife's *dissatisfied face*). Of course if he won't see reason, then we may have to start proceedings. And if we *do* start—(*a gesture to show the bull-dog breed*).

SCAIFE. That's the stuff.

BLACKSHAW (*suddenly smiling*). Good-bye.

SCAIFE (*shaking hands*). Good-bye. (*Exit.*)

BLACKSHAW (*reassuringly as* Scaife *goes out, calling after him*). You'll hear from me before six to-morrow . . . . (*he makes a rapid note of the interview in his "Solicitor's Annual Diary."*) Pidduck!

(*Enter* Pidduck, *full of devotion.*)

PIDDUCK. So you've got back earlier than you hoped.

BLACKSHAW (*ignoring the remark*). Heard the sad news about Scaife?

PIDDUCK. Sad news?

BLACKSHAW. Dying of consumption.

PIDDUCK (*puzzled, humourless*). This is very surprising. (*Picking up a basket of letters and documents.*) One or two urgent things here.

BLACKSHAW. To-night?

PIDDUCK (*firmly*). Yes.

BLACKSHAW (*firmly*). No.

PIDDUCK. Very well.

BLACKSHAW (*taking up the telephone*). Hillport 44. (*While he waits; to* Pidduck). Considering I wasn't expected back until to-morrow night, nothing can be urgent till then. I want to *talk* to you. Sit down.

PIDDUCK. I prefer to stand.

BLACKSHAW (*in the telephone*). Hello! (*sweetly*) That's my little Doris, isn't it? . . . No, no! . . . Well, I'll see later on. I want to speak to Mummy. Get away. Get away.—That you, Maria? . . . Health? Perfect. Listen. Get into the car and come round here *now*. I want you . . . . No, she mustn't come . . . . Oh, all right, let the little tyrant come. I expect I've got something for her. (*Hangs up the receiver. Surveying* Pidduck.) Well, Pidduck, so that's you, is it?

PIDDUCK. Did you get anything satisfactory out of the Local Government Board?

BLACKSHAW. What about?

PIDDUCK. The projected new road to Turnhill of course. (*Confidentially.*) I hear there was a secret confab at the Mayor's house last night.

BLACKSHAW. Oh! A junta! A cave, eh? Determined to do me down, are they? (*Laughs.*)

PIDDUCK. Something like that, I fear. (*Confidently.*) But they won't.

BLACKSHAW. Usual thing. The moment you begin to try to deal with unemployment scientifically, all the super-tax payers in the

landscape cry out—(*sharply*) Socialist! And you're as bad as any of 'em, Pidduck.

PIDDUCK (*hurt*). I always back you up.

BLACKSHAW. Yes, with your heart. Not with your brain—such as it is. You're a hide-bound reactionary, but thank God you don't know it. If you were suddenly made a rich man, in six months you'd be wanting the Feudal system back again.

PIDDUCK (*gloomily*). I shall never be rich.

BLACKSHAW. You won't if you're left to yourself. But supposing you aren't?

PIDDUCK (*shaking his head*). Never! Never!

BLACKSHAW. Don't be too sure! (Pidduck *still shakes his head.*) Very well! Very well!—Now let me tell you,—I've got the Local Government Board in my pocket. (*Taps his breast-pocket.*) The whole Board.

PIDDUCK. Excellent news. And Stanways? What do they think of the prospects in Gellibrand versus Pickersgill; and Smith versus Pye-Smith?

BLACKSHAW. Listen. Gellibrand versus Pickersgill, and Smith versus Pye-Smith, and the rest of the versuses,—all these lucrative cases have become as dust in the balance. They simply don't exist any longer.

PIDDUCK. What?

BLACKSHAW. Stanway and Stanway, that majestic and colossal firm of legal conjurers, London agents for about half the solicitors in the provinces, Stanways—now listen and keep your nerve—

Stanways have offered me, Simon Blackshaw of the Five Towns, a partnership. Yes, *sir ! Now* will you sit down. (Pidduck *sits*.) I thought you would.

PIDDUCK (*weakly*). Well! Well!

BLACKSHAW. I will conceal nothing from you, my dear managing clerk. Stanway and Stanway have been nibbling at me for months. Young Stanway, the nephew, ever since he married a quarter of a million, has been haunted by the horrible suspicion that hard, daily work would be fatal to his constitution. So he's retiring. Old Stanway therefore wants a partner, and being of an original turn of mind he wants *the* partner, and that's me!

PIDDUCK. I see!

BLACKSHAW. No fool, old Stanway! He's had one good idea in his life. It's a lot!

PIDDUCK (*feebly*). Bless us! Bless us!

BLACKSHAW. By all means. Old Stanway couldn't hold himself in any more after he'd consulted me, over a prime lunch—*he* paid for it—about the Opletree case.

PIDDUCK. What's the Opletree case ?

BLACKSHAW. Mrs. Opletree is a young and beautiful woman, my dear Pidduck. She and her husband live somewhere in Essex. Very wisely she chose a father who'd made millions in Canada. He died suddenly a few months ago, here in England, and left nearly all his money to her. Her step-mother is contesting the will, alleging undue influence.

PIDDUCK. And was there undue influence ?

BLACKSHAW. Positively none whatever. But the step-mother—a vamp—has got hold of the late millionaire's nurse, who would be liable to say practically anything in the witness box.

PIDDUCK. Well ?

BLACKSHAW. Well, I advised old Stanway to do the vanishing trick on the nurse.

PIDDUCK. What's the vanishing trick ?

BLACKSHAW. Spiriting her away. Overpaid post on a yacht—to a sick lady, etc., etc. Sounds melodramatic, but isn't really. I arranged all the details for him myself. In fact the ingenuity of Simon Blackshaw completely and finally conquered old Stanway. He as good as went down on his knees in offering me the partnership. And there you are!

PIDDUCK. Bit tricky isn't it, what you advised?

BLACKSHAW (*after a pause*). And what if it is ?

PIDDUCK. I suppose you argue that as the other side is unscrupulous, Stanways are justified—

BLACKSHAW. Please don't suppose anything of the kind. I agree with you entirely that one piece of sharp practice never excuses another. What does excuse the—er—procedure I suggested, is the sacred cause of justice. I had the pleasure of meeting Mrs. Opletree. And when I saw this lovely creature, my blood fair boiled within me at the thought that two wicked women, her stepmother and the nurse, might rob her—

"rob" is the only word—of the vast fortune which is rightfully hers. And I told old Stanway that he should hesitate at nothing—nothing!—in order to prevent the robbery. I cannot bear injustice. I never could.

PIDDUCK (*impressed*). That's true.

BLACKSHAW (*taking a paper from his dispatch-case*). I drafted a letter in the train accepting Stanway's offer of a partnership. The question is: am I to send it?

PIDDUCK (*with a gleam of hope*). Then you haven't decided yet?

BLACKSHAW. Of course not. It's a very big step. I must consult Mrs. Blackshaw .... And you.

PIDDUCK. *I* think it would be a mistake.

BLACKSHAW (*challengingly*). Why?

PIDDUCK. Oh! It's no use me saying anything.

BLACKSHAW. Pidduck, do remember you've only got two legs. Don't be a donkey.

PIDDUCK. I've worked under you for ten years.

BLACKSHAW. I know it. You've helped me to build up this business.

PIDDUCK. And what's going to happen to the business here, if you leave Bursley?

BLACKSHAW. *You* are going to happen to it.

PIDDUCK. How do you mean?

BLACKSHAW. You're going to buy it from me. Very cheap and on easy terms.

PIDDUCK (*morosely*). I'm only a clerk.

BLACKSHAW. You're a solicitor. All you have to do is to take out your practising certificate.

PIDDUCK. *I* couldn't run the business.

BLACKSHAW. Of course you could run it. You have faults. You're slow. Sometimes you're quite remarkably stupid. You're conceited.

PIDDUCK. Me conceited!

BLACKSHAW. Conceited. But you have qualities. You know the law. You know the district. You've lots of commonsense — if you aren't hurried. And, most important, everybody trusts you.

PIDDUCK. You're very generous, Mr. Blackshaw. But I don't *want* to run the business. I'm not ambitious, and it's no use pretending I am.

BLACKSHAW (*standing up, in energetic reproof*). Then you're a coward. Man, think of your sons!

(Doris *enters quickly. She is a child of twelve, alert—with a will of her own.*)

BLACKSHAW. Hello, you! But where's your mother?

DORIS. Toiling up the stairs.

(Pidduck *rushes out without a word, shutting the door.* Blackshaw *is left alone with* Doris. *He jumps up from his desk eagerly and kisses her. She kisses him.*)

BLACKSHAW. Go and feel in the pocket of my overcoat.

DORIS. Is it something for me ?

BLACKSHAW. I shouldn't be surprised.

DORIS. I don't want anything.

BLACKSHAW (*rather hurt*). What ?

DORIS. I only want you. I was greedy on the 'phone. I'm so glad you've come to-night. I couldn't have lasted another day. (*She kisses him again. Then with a quaint smile.*) Shall I look ?

(Blackshaw *nods*, Doris *pulls out of the overcoat pocket a box of chocolates.*)

DORIS. Chocs! Oh, how heavenly!

BLACKSHAW. That's not all. Other pocket.

DORIS (*pulling out a book*). A "Primer of Mathematics"! How *perfectly* heavenly! (*Opens the book.*) I'll owe you the kisses, father.

BLACKSHAW (*half to himself*). Was there ever such a weird girl!

(Maria Blackshaw *comes into the room. She is a woman of five-and-thirty, plump, placid, devoted to* Blackshaw, *full of unconscious dignity. She is dressed in a simple dark coat and skirt of the cut of* 1911. *Also a fur tippet—all very neat and of excellent quality, but not smart.*)

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*with suppressed excitement*). Simon!

BLACKSHAW (*observing his wife's face, to* Doris). Run and show it to Mr. Pidduck. Run! (*with authority.*) Run! (*Exit* Doris.)

BLACKSHAW (*to his wife*). He's been telling you! (Mrs. Blackshaw *nods.*) A nice thing. I can't be the first to tell my own wife my own affairs! A nice thing indeed!

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*kissing him calmly and affectionately*). You know how he is, my dear. Anything that concerns you always excites him. He only lives for you. (*She sits and waits.*)

BLACKSHAW (*after a pause, turning on her*). What do you think of it? I'll do nothing against your wishes.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Whatever suits you will suit me, Simon.

BLACKSHAW. No, no! What do you *think* of it?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. I don't know what to think.

BLACKSHAW. But you *must* know. (*A slight pause.*) It's a tremendous opportunity.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Isn't it a big risk?

BLACKSHAW. Risk! But that's what life *is*.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. I was only thinking we've been very comfortable. Both of us born here, and married here, and Doris born here. Of course it's been a great struggle, but you've won. Naturally! You're one of the biggest men in Bursley. Everything's coming to you. And now—

BLACKSHAW. And do you imagine I shouldn't be one of the biggest men in London—in time?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. I'm quite sure you would. (*Continuing in the same placid tone, without a pause.*) You *seemed* rather pleased last week when it was settled that you were to be Mayor next year.

BLACKSHAW. Mayor of Bursley! Good God! I say, Maria. You remember when I had to alter my collars from sixteen to sixteen and a half?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Are the new ones too small now?

BLACKSHAW. Yes. Bursley's sixteens. I'm strangled. And I don't want seventeens either. I want seventies! And I've felt like that for a long time.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. You don't mean you intend to be Lord Mayor of London!

BLACKSHAW. Pooh! What's that!

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*still calmly*). Oh! And then that unemployment scheme. The new road to Turnhill. I'm afraid it'll come to nothing if you aren't there to push it along.

BLACKSHAW. And what if it does come to nothing—?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. You know best, my dear. I'm only chatting. You always let me talk freely to you. I was only just thinking—

BLACKSHAW. Take that unemployment scheme, for instance. Don't you see, old girl,

that if I can do something in Bursley for the unemployed—the right of every man who is willing to work to *get* work—don't you see I can do much more for that great cause in London? . . . . One reason why I want to go to London.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Politics then?

BLACKSHAW. How do I know? Politics! Anything! Everything! I must have scope! Scope! It's come over me suddenly, mightily, overpoweringly. And I can only find scope in London. Everybody who is anybody goes to London. Must! London's the magnet that draws—*steel!* Always did! Always will! I've got to have London. She's marvellous, London is! She's astounding! . . . And she's waiting for me. Waiting! . . . . But you?

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*after a pause, placidly*). I'll make a home for you in London.

BLACKSHAW. Maria!

MRS. BLACKSHAW. I daresay I shall manage pretty well.

BLACKSHAW. It's an enormous enterprise, Maria!

MRS. BLACKSHAW. If I do the shopping myself—

BLACKSHAW (*tranquillised*). I felt sure you would encourage me. Now I'll sign this letter.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. What letter?

BLACKSHAW. Accepting Stanways' offer of partnership. (*Signs with an immense flourish.*)

(*Enter* Doris.)

DORIS. Father, what sort of place *is* London?

BLACKSHAW. So he's been telling you too, has he? (*Calling.*) Pidduck! (*To* Doris.) London is one solid mass of books and chocolates. (*To* Pidduck *who has entered: in a kind tone.*) Have this letter registered, will you please?

(Pidduck *takes the letter, looks at it, and hurries off in order to hide his feelings.*)

DORIS (*surprised*). I never knew *men* cried.

CURTAIN.

Scene II

The Courtyard of the White Horse Inn at Ipswich. An archway centre leads to the street. To the left centre a smaller arch leads to the bar-parlour. To the right a doorway leads to the rest of the house. The Courtyard is roofed over with glass. There are several tables right and left with chairs, also a screen right, sheltering the tables from the draught. It is about one o'clock on a bright October day.

Howard Nathan, *a smart, somewhat overdressed Jew of thirty is standing between two men:* Hayward, *a hot, nervous, excitable, suspicious little fellow, and* Stone, *calm, hard and definite.*

Nathan. Well, gentlemen, both of you have seen the motor-boat ; and you've both had a trial trip in her. The question now is, which of you is going to make an offer that I can accept for my perfect little launch.

Stone. May I ask why you're so anxious to get rid of this piece of perfection, Mr. Nathan ?

Nathan. I'm leaving Ipswich to settle in London, Mr. Stone.

Stone. And here I've come all the way *from* London—

Hayward. *I've* come all the way from Southampton.

NATHAN. Well, if you put it like that, I've come all the way from Jerusalem.

HAYWARD. Seems rather funny, Mr. Nathan, that you should have made the same appointment for both of us here at the White Horse.

NATHAN. I never miss the chance of a nice little auction. Now, Mr. Stone! For this perfect little launch, what offer ?

STONE. A hundred and eighty. Take it or leave it.

NATHAN. Don't make me laugh. (*With meaning.*) It makes me show my teeth. I don't mind telling you Mr. Hayward has offered me two hundred.

HAYWARD. I did no such thing. I said a hundred and ninety.

NATHAN (*affecting astonishment*). No!

HAYWARD (*indignantly*). Most certainly.

NATHAN. If you say so, of course I believe you. But I've never known myself mistaken in figures before. Well, Mr. Stone, a hundred and ninety's offered. Any advance on a hundred and ninety ?

STONE. Hundred and ninety-two. And that's my last word, and I mean it.

NATHAN. Mr. Hayward! (*A pause.*) Come, come, gentlemen. I'm not a dentist. Don't let me have to *extract* the bids for this perfect little launch.

HAYWARD (*agonised*). One ninety-five.

NATHAN. Mr. Stone?

STONE (*sitting down nonchalantly*). I'm out of this.

NATHAN. Well, I'm sorry, gentlemen. I can't take less than two hundred. The lot must be withdrawn. Unless Mr. Hayward will — spring?

HAYWARD. Spring! I promised my wife I wouldn't go beyond a hundred and eighty-five, and here I am at a hundred and ninety-five! Not a penny more. And while I'm about it, Mr. Nathan, I should have thought better of you, if you'd told me before I came that two hundred was the lowest. I shouldn't have come.

NATHAN. Ah! But I wanted you to come.

HAYWARD. It's simply scandalous!

NATHAN (*fawning*). Please, please, Mr. Hayward, don't take it like that. I'll find you a cheaper boat. I'll find you a beautiful little boat at a hundred and fifty.

HAYWARD (*furious*). Oh no, you won't!

(*Exit tempestuously through the archway centre.*)

NATHAN (*gazing after him*). Pity he's married! Well, Mr. Stone, I'm sorry you've had your journey for nothing. Very sorry. But I can't take a penny less than two hundred.

STONE (*rising*). Quite, quite! Good-bye. Better luck next time.

NATHAN. Good-bye.

(Stone *goes off through the archway centre. A pause.* Nathan *whistles and lights a cigarette. His manner shows that he hopes he has landed his fish.* Stone *re-enters.* Nathan *pretends not to see him.* Stone *sits down at the table and writes out a cheque in silence.*)

STONE. The date ?

NATHAN (*ingratiatingly*). Twenty-first of October. Twenty-first, Mr. Stone.

STONE. Here! (*handing the cheque*). I'll arrange to take delivery of the launch to-morrow.

NATHAN (*scrutinizing the cheque*). Thank you! Thank you, Mr. Stone . . . (*Smiling benevolently.*) I knew you'd rise to two hundred. I could see it in your eyes.

STONE. I'll tell you something you couldn't see in my eyes.

NATHAN. Yes ?

STONE. I was prepared to give two hundred and twenty-five.

NATHAN. Gosh!

STONE. I've often wanted to meet a Jew in business. I've heard so much about them. You see, I'm from Aberdeen.

NATHAN. Aberdeen! But you have no Scotch accent.

STONE. Oh, yes, I have. But I dinna use it in business. (*He starts for the arch centre.*)

NATHAN (*calling him back*). I say!

STONE (*turning under the arch*). Well ?

NATHAN. Did you see in *my* eyes that I'd bought the launch for a hundred ?

(Stone *goes off quickly through the arch.* Nathan *pockets the cheque, humming and smiling to himself in a satisfied manner. Meanwhile the sound of a woman's voice and a man's, evidently disputing, is heard from the bar-parlour left. A moment after* Georgie Dream, *a young, rather obviously blonde, pretty girl of twenty-two, in a tawdry, shabby dress in the fashion of* 1911, *and carrying a worn out vanity bag, enters from the arch left, followed by an angry, elderly barman of a heavy type.*)

BARMAN. You must understand, Miss, that I shall have to call a policeman. Manager isn't in, and I'm responsible for my bar.

(*He stands in her way.*)

GEORGIE (*fumbling insincerely in her bag*). But don't I tell you I've left my purse at my rooms —or else it's been pinched ?

BARMAN (*seizing on the slang word "pinched"*). "Pinched." Yes. Pity you didn't find that out before you'd eaten them biscuits and drunk that glass o' sherry. (*Imitating her order.*) "Glass of sherry and some biscuits." And me not supposed to serve unaccompanied ladies!

(Georgie *tries half desperately to get past him. He stops her with his hand.*)

GEORGIE. Oh please! You're not going to— (*she sinks into a seat*).

(*The* Barman *rings the ostler's bell, which reverberates startlingly and solemnly.*)

BARMAN (*menacingly*). I've been behind bars for twenty years and more, and I *may* say I've heard your story before. Either you pay me—*and* now; or it's the police.

(Georgie *cries.*)

NATHAN (*quietly: after a careful examination of* Georgie). Here. How much is it ?

BARMAN. It's one and two, sir.

NATHAN (*handing him a coin*). Half-a-crown. That'll be right.

(*The* Boots *enters by the doorway left, in response to the big bell.*)

BARMAN (*to* Nathan). Thank you, sir. (*To* Boots.) All right. I've seen to it myself.

(*The* Boots *nods and leaves again by the same door.*)

(*To* Georgie.) No offence, Miss, but this is a respectable hotel. You chose the wrong place.

(*The* Barman *goes back into his bar.*)

NATHAN. Did he hurt you ?

GEORGIE (*wiping her eyes*). No. It was the touch of him. Oh! I can't begin to thank you.

NATHAN. What's half-a-crown ?

GEORGIE. It isn't so much the money, though heaven above knows that's a good deal, seeing how I'm fixed. It's your good nature.

(*She powders her nose looking in the glass of her vanity bag.*)

NATHAN. Any gentleman would have done the same. Anybody with any feelings.

GEORGIE. Mostly, they don't have feelings—not *nice* feelings, that is.

NATHAN. Oh!

(*A short pause.*)

GEORGIE (*closing up her vanity bag*). Well, I suppose I'd better be going before they make me.

NATHAN. They won't bother you as long as you're with me. (*Sits down near her.*)

GEORGIE. I wonder if you'll let me have your name and address?

NATHAN (*misinterpreting her*). My name and address?

GEORGIE. So I can pay you back that half-crown, of course. I can't quite do it to-day.

NATHAN (*smiling*). Can't you? And supposing I couldn't wait? I might be ruined for want of that half-dollar. (Georgie *gives a little shy, sympathetic laugh.* Nathan *draws closer to her.*) Hard up as all that? (Georgie *nods.*) Straight? (Georgie *nods.*) Not a brass farthing in the world? (Georgie *shakes her head.*) Is that possible in a rich country like England, and a fine-looking young woman like you?

GEORGIE. Well, it *is* possible.

NATHAN. How?

GEORGIE (*with a sigh*). Oh! The usual story. Stranded. That's all. It's too common to interest *you*.

NATHAN. Let me be the judge of that, won't you ?

GEORGIE. It's too long, too.

NATHAN. Tell me a bit of it, then. Tell me half-a-crown's worth. You owe me that.

GEORGIE (*appreciative of his quaintness*). You *are* funny! Well, if you *must* know, Mr. Inquisitive, I'm on the halls, on tour. I'm Georgie Dream.

NATHAN. You're the one that fainted on the stage last night ?

GEORGIE (*interested*). Yes. Did you see me ? How did I look ?

NATHAN (*shaking his head*). I only heard about it. Seems they gave you the bird.

GEORGIE. Every feather of it.

NATHAN. What a shame!

GEORGIE (*rushingly*). Yes, I should think so. I had the flu in February and I worked all through it for them, ill as I was, two shows a night. Yes, I did. And what with coughing and my chest, my voice is pretty well ruined. But I kept going to oblige them ; they couldn't do without me, you see.

NATHAN. Naturally.

GEORGIE. And last night I had the most frightful upset. You heard me tell the barman

that my purse had been pinched. Well, it *was* pinched. Only not this morning. Last night. Out of my dressing-room, just before I had to go on.—I'd popped in to the girl next door to borrow a stick of grease-paint. When I got back, the purse was gone! Fair knocked me down flat, it did!

NATHAN. Lot o' money?

GEORGIE. Only all I had! And what with that and me having no voice and rushing on all of a tremble—well—they gave me the bird and I fainted. But they *did* applaud *after* I'd fainted. They're very nice really, the public are. That I *will* say.

NATHAN. Course they'd be nice to you.

GEORGIE. Yes, but this morning, do you know what happened when I went to complain to our manager about the purse? Sacked me on the spot. On the spot, if you please. And told me he'd "*see* about" my half-week's salary! See about it! I was desperate! You can imagine! I'd had no breakfast! I was all in a daze. I just *had* to have something. So in I came here, and ordered a glass of sherry and a biscuit and chanced it.

NATHAN. It's disgusting! Disgusting!

GEORGIE. Isn't it! But I'm not surprised! Broke a looking-glass last week.

NATHAN. But what are you going to do now?

GEORGIE. Ask me another! (*She laughs half hysterically.*)

NATHAN. Supposing I helped you along a bit. Just till things get straight for you. What do you say ?

GEORGIE. Oh! Mr.—Mr.—

NATHAN. Nathan's my name. Howard Nathan. (*With a wink.*) Spanish, you know.

GEORGIE. It's terribly good of you. Only I've never taken money from a gentleman before.

NATHAN (*positively*). I swear you have.

GEORGIE (*indignantly*). Indeed I've not!

NATHAN. What about my half-crown ?

GEORGIE (*smiling*). Oh! You *are* funny!

NATHAN. Well ?

GEORGIE. Oh! I couldn't take money. I really couldn't. I wasn't brought up that way.

NATHAN. Now don't be an old silly, my dear. *Never refuse money.* You won't get on if you do.

GEORGIE (*shyly*). Oh! I know! But it does make you feel a bit all-overish, accepting favours, don't it ?

NATHAN (*firmly, keeping her to the point*). Well ?

GEORGIE. Well, I really can't say straight off like that, can I ?

NATHAN. Why not ? (*Closer.*) I'm all right.

GEORGIE (*smiling*). You don't have to tell me that.

(*At that moment, through the arch centre, comes Captain* Maurice Opletree, *a thick-set man of thirty-three of the sporting type. With him is Major*

Riggs-Falkiner, *thirty-six, tall, well bred, interested in women. They are both wearing motor-coats.*)

OPLETREE. The bar's round here to the left.

(*At the sound of* Opletree's *voice* Nathan *looks round, the expression on his face showing that his thoughts have passed suddenly from* Georgie *to something much more serious and important.*)

NATHAN (*with a quick, furtive eye to* Georgie). Business, d'you mind ?

GEORGIE. Please.

FALKINER (*looking round*). So this is the world-renowned White Horse, immortalised by Dickens!

OPLETREE (*heavily*). The only Dickens I'm interested in at the moment is my dickens of a thirst. Ha! Ha! Come on.

NATHAN (*accosting* Opletree). Good morning, Captain.

OPLETREE (*somewhat perturbed, but carrying the situation off with a certain pomposity*). Morning, morning. Come along, Falkiner.

NATHAN (*obsequious but persistent*). One word with you, Captain ? Yes ?

OPLETREE. Later on, later on.

NATHAN (*definite, but still obsequious*). Can't we make it now, Captain ?

OPLETREE. You see I'm not alone.

NATHAN (*to both* Opletree *and* Falkiner). Perhaps this gentleman wouldn't mind waiting one moment ?

FALKINER (*nodding*). I shall be all right.

NATHAN. This is Miss Georgie Dream. You've seen her on the posters of course. One of our greatest Music-hall stars.

GEORGIE. Oh, Mr. Nathan!

NATHAN (*aside to* Georgie). Take care of the moustache for me. It'll help me.

GEORGIE (*instantly anxious to help* Nathan *by playing the role he has assigned to her : to* Falkiner). Lovely weather we're having.

FALKINER (*ingratiating, but sure of himself*). Er—yes. And so you're Georgie Dream.

GEORGIE (*flirtatious ; smiling*). You have the advantage of me.

FALKINER. My name's Riggs-Falkiner. Major Riggs-Falkiner.

GEORGIE. In the real army ?

FALKINER. I'm afraid so.

GEORGIE (*archly*). You're sure it isn't the Territorials ?

FALKINER. Oh quite!

GEORGIE. D'you know I've never met a *real* Major before.

FALKINER. No ? Well, here's a specimen, all ready to be sampled.

(Georgie *moves away to a table in the right hand corner, drawing the interested* Major *after her by a side glance. They sit down. It is seen that she has asked him for a cigarette. They smoke.*)

NATHAN (*to* Opletree). Bit of luck for both of us, me running across you like this. I was just coming over to Hillcrest.

OPLETREE. Not to my house ?

NATHAN. I thought it would be more convenient for you. You don't seem to have time to answer my letters.

OPLETREE. Well, what do you want ?

NATHAN. Nothing! Nothing! Only my money. One thousand pounds. A trifle to you, Captain, but a lot to me. And it's three days overdue.

OPLETREE. You don't say so.

NATHAN. Yes.

OPLETREE. I'm sorry, but I can't let you have it immediately. It will be all right—

NATHAN (*with meaning*). Oh, it will! But I want the money now. I'm leaving Ipswich for good. And I must clear up all my little affairs before I go. Otherwise I should have been delighted—

OPLETREE. But I haven't got the money. I fully expected to have it. In fact I was sure of it, but—

NATHAN (*half fawningly*). You wouldn't have me take proceedings on the Bill of Sale.

OPLETREE. You wouldn't!

NATHAN. Well, what *am* I to do ?

OPLETREE. Renew the loan.

NATHAN (*as if marvelling at the novelty of the idea*). Renew the loan! I see. I see. For how long?

OPLETREE. Oh! Another six months, say.

NATHAN. To oblige you, Captain. I'll renew it. For fourteen hundred.

OPLETREE. Look here. It's only six months ago, I had the original loan of eight hundred. I signed then for a thousand.

NATHAN. Well, it's easiest to do it that way. Saves calculating the interest.

OPLETREE. Now you want me to sign for fourteen hundred. That makes six hundred pounds interest on eight hundred for a year. What percentage is that?

NATHAN. I don't know. I never *could* calculate interest. But if you'd prefer to settle at once, please do. I only wanted to be agreeable.

OPLETREE (*impatiently*). Oh, very well. Fourteen hundred.

NATHAN. But, of course, I shall need just a little extra security.

OPLETREE. Why?

NATHAN. Well, the present loan is on your furniture only. You never know what'll happen to furniture at an auction.

OPLETREE. An auction? Of my furniture?

NATHAN. A mere supposition. Now my idea is that you should include your motor-car in the bill of sale.

OPLETREE (*disgusted and impatient*). Oh, very well. As you like. I can't discuss the damn thing for ever.

NATHAN. I'll just jot down the arrangement. (*He writes.*)

FALKINER (*to* Georgie, *watching* Nathan *and* Opletree). Is your friend a money-lender, by any chance ?

GEORGIE. He's a very good natured man.

FALKINER. I'm sure he is. (*With humour.*) And Captain Opletree seems to think so too. Now, you know, you're very handsome. It's astonishing how these Israelites—no offence!—how they manage to—er—please the best-looking women.

GEORGIE. Perhaps it's because they really *care* for women.

FALKINER (*warmly : gazing at her*). Some Gentiles do too, you know.

GEORGIE. Are you among them ?

NATHAN (*handing paper to* Opletree). Is that in order ?

OPLETREE (*glancing carelessly at the paper*). Oh! I suppose so.

NATHAN. You might call round at my office this afternoon and I'll have things ready for you to sign.

OPLETREE. Me call at your office !—Oh, very well.

NATHAN. And I shall want the makers' number of your car. (Opletree *turns away.*) Good morning, Captain.

OPLETREE (*impatiently and rudely*). Morning. Come along, Falkiner. Sorry to have kept you.

FALKINER. Not at all. Had a most agreeable little chat. Good morning, Miss Georgie.

GEORGIE (*coldly*). Good morning, Major.

(Opletree *and* Falkiner *go off into the bar, left.*)

NATHAN (*walking over to* Georgie). You managed that beautifully.

GEORGIE (*pleased at his praise*). I'm so glad if I helped you.

NATHAN. And you did, too! Cut him off rather sharp at the end, I noticed.

GEORGIE. I should think so, indeed. He was very rude about you.

NATHAN. Ah! What did he say about me?

GEORGIE. He called you an Israelite.

NATHAN. May be rude. But it's true. I *am*.

GEORGIE. Then he asked if you were a moneylender.

NATHAN. That's more serious. I'm not a moneylender. I'm a financial agent.

GEORGIE (*intelligently*). Anyway you lent *me* money.

NATHAN. Well?

GEORGIE. Well what?

NATHAN. You know.

GEORGIE. Do I ?

NATHAN. Yes. You've been helping me. Will you let me help you—a bit more—a *lot* more ?

GEORGIE. You see, Mr. Nathan. I must be straight with you. Nothing would induce me to stay here in Ipswich. I'm going away the minute I can.

NATHAN. Where to ? Not Scotland, I hope.

GEORGIE. London. There's nowhere but London. Either I'll succeed in London or starve to death there. I've always dreamt of bringing the house down at the Coliseum! And you mayn't think so, but I've got it in me to do it. I know I have.

NATHAN. But I *do* think you've got it in you. Now I'll tell *you* something.

GEORGIE. Yes ?

NATHAN. *I'm* off to London, too. There *is* nowhere but London, and I'm going to put London on the map. You see if I don't.

GEORGIE. Isn't it lovely to talk about what you mean to do!

NATHAN. Let's go to Limmer's and have some lunch, eh ? And talk there. Shall we ?

(Georgie *gives a gesture of assent. They turn and go off through the centre arch together.*)

CURTAIN.

Scene III

The Drawing-room at Hillcrest, the Opletree's *house near Mistley, Essex. It is a pleasant room with a large bow-window centre, from which French windows lead out into a sunny garden. A door, right, leads to the hall. The furnishing is comfortable and in good taste, but not extravagant; there is a lot of flowered chintz, and a family portrait or two.*

It is about four in the afternoon of an April day.

Oriana Opletree, *a handsome, woman of twenty-five, is seated on a Chesterfield, engaged on an important piece of woollen embroidery. She is wearing a tea-gown.*

The door from the hall opens and Riggs-Falkiner *enters, followed by* Maurice Opletree. *Both men are dressed differently from the last scene.* Opletree *has on country clothes.* Falkiner *is in his Town get-up, as if about to depart.*

Opletree. Look here, Oriana, what's happened to the car? Arthur's train goes in twenty minutes. (*Looking at his watch.*) Nineteen, rather. The way this house is run—

Oriana. You told me *you*'d ordered the car. Ring, my poor boy.

Opletree. No. I suppose I'd better see to things myself—as usual.

(*He goes off again into the hall.*)

FALKINER (*looking at his watch, calmly*). There's heaps of time. And besides I don't care if I do miss the train. Plenty more trains.

ORIANA. Won't you stay another day ?

FALKINER. Awfully nice of you! I'd love to but I mustn't. Really.

ORIANA. Do stay. You pretend to like us, but remember it's exactly six months since you were here last. All winter.

FALKINER. Six months ? Nothing of the kind!

ORIANA. Yes. Maurice took you to see the White Horse at Ipswich. I know it was in October because—

FALKINER. Guilty! Guilty! Yes, I've always been *wanting* to run down and see you. Couldn't manage it somehow.

ORIANA (*persuasively*). One more day. (Falkiner *shakes his head decisively.*) (*She continues, resigned to his refusal.*) I should have been delighted, and I know Maurice would. You do him more good than anybody.

FALKINER. He's in a great state of nerves. All due to the case, no doubt. I'm sure if *I* had a wife and she was down for nearly a million in her father's will, and the will was being fought in the Courts—by Jove, I should be in some state of nerves!

ORIANA (*calmly*). Would you ?

FALKINER. All this week-end I've marvelled at your calmness, Oriana. But of course you can't lose.

ORIANA (*leaning forward*). I may, Arthur.

FALKINER. Then you'll have no more faithful comforter than me. If I *can* comfort you.

ORIANA (*quietly following her own thoughts*). If it comes off all right, do you know what I shall do ?

FALKINER. Buy a bigger place.

ORIANA. No. I shall have a large house in London.

FALKINER. Why a *large* house ?

ORIANA. I shall spend most of my time there.

FALKINER. Maurice won't like that.

ORIANA (*gently*). But I also exist, don't I ?

FALKINER. How exquisitely you say that! Of course you exist. But oh! Why is it that women don't understand their own charm ? Why *is* it ?

ORIANA. Oh ?

FALKINER. Can't you see you're perfect in the peace and calm of the country. Why do you hanker after the awful, silly racket of London ? You're above that.

ORIANA. Yet *you*'re always there. I've just reminded you it's six months—

FALKINER. I know! I know! Don't remind me again. But you see I'm enslaved to London. London's my vice.

ORIANA. I wish it was mine.

FALKINER (*with emotion*). Don't. I can't bear to hear you. Let me just tell you. I've knocked

about a bit. I'm generally entangled somewhere. But do you know what gives me more pleasure —does me more good than anything?

ORIANA. What?

FALKINER. It's the thought of *you*, here, living calmly and beautifully. I assure you, some nights when I get home to my chambers disgusted with what I've done and seen done, I have a sort of vision of you sitting serenely, just as you are now, at that exquisite needlework. And—well—I'd give anything to be old Maurice, —with all his gloom.

ORIANA. Arthur!

FALKINER. Well, there it is! I've told you. anyway. You in London! A sacrilege, that's what it would be, nothing less.

(Opletree *enters from the hall, his cap on.*)

OPLETREE. Car's here! Bags are all in. Haven't a moment! You'll barely do it.

FALKINER. Good-bye. Good-bye, Oriana. Best of luck with the case. I shall be on tenterhooks. And thanks awfully for a heavenly week-end. By-bye.

(Opletree *and* Falkiner *leave.*)

(Oriana *slowly returns to her embroidery.*)

(Opletree *re-enters from the hall, his cap still on. He comes to* Oriana. *She points to his cap, he pulls it off and sits on the Chesterfield next to her.*)

OPLETREE (*after settling down*). That's it. Let's be alone together. (*He lights a pipe and carelessly puffs smoke into her face.*)

ORIANA. I suppose he'll catch his train.

OPLETREE. I suppose he will, if he's unlucky.

ORIANA. If he's unlucky ?

OPLETREE. Fancy going to London when you don't have to!

ORIANA (*sympathetically*). You really hate London, don't you, my poor boy ?

OPLETREE. My God! What a place. What is there to do there ?

(Brunton, *a parlour-maid, enters with a card on a tray*, Opletree *takes it.*)

OPLETREE (*disturbed*). Is he here ?

BRUNTON. In the hall, sir.

OPLETREE (*in his emotion*). Well, I'm hanged. I'll—I'll—show him into the morning-room.

BRUNTON. Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

ORIANA. Who is it ?

OPLETREE. Oh ! Nobody you know.

(*He is standing with his back to her, his hands behind him. She takes the card from his fingers and reads it.*)

ORIANA. " Mr. Howard Nathan. Financial Agent." Maurice, you don't mean to say you're going to borrow money again ?

OPLETREE (*desperately*). No. I *have* borrowed it. Now I've got to pay it back, and I haven't a cent.

ORIANA. Maurice! How much have you borrowed ?

OPLETREE. Well, you'd have to know in the end—you may as well know now. There's fourteen hundred to pay.

ORIANA. You borrowed fourteen hundred pounds!

OPLETREE. I borrowed eight. The rest's interest.

ORIANA. When did you borrow it.

OPLETREE. A year ago. Now it's no good you looking at me like that. I had filthy luck at Newmarket and I couldn't settle. So I went to the Jews.

ORIANA. Again! After you'd promised me!

OPLETREE (*self-excusingly*). It was before your step-mother began the action. I thought we should have tons of the ready.

ORIANA. When's the payment due ?

OPLETREE. To-day, but I certainly didn't think the fellow would call.

ORIANA. And you left it till the last day, and not a word to me.

OPLETREE. I daren't tell you.

ORIANA. But what are we to do ? It takes me all my time to keep the house going with *my* money. And you couldn't borrow a penny more on the place.

OPLETREE. I know that. But there was the furniture and the car.

ORIANA. Oh, this is—this is unforgivable!

OPLETREE (*with a forced laugh*). You needn't be so damned tragic. You're bound to win your case. Bound to!

ORIANA. But supposing I don't win ?

OPLETREE. Oh well, if you're going to be gloomy, instead of bucking me up—!

ORIANA. And this is what I bury myself in the country for!

(Brunton *enters*.)

BRUNTON. Mr. Blackshaw, madam. He's driven over from Ipswich in a taxi. He asked me to say he's very pressed for time.

OPLETREE. Good God! What in the name of—

ORIANA. Show Mr. Blackshaw in at once, Brunton. (*She scribbles on a piece of paper*.)

OPLETREE. Something's gone wrong . . . Just our luck! (*Almost savagely*.) What are you doing ?

ORIANA. Nothing. (*She stops*.)

(Brunton *ushers in* Mr. Blackshaw.)

(Oriana *rises to greet him. He shakes hands very rapidly with both of them*.)

BLACKSHAW. I know how agitating my bursting in like this must be for you. But I thought I'd better run down, and Stanway agreed with me. The other side want to settle.

ORIANA. My step-mother wants to settle! . . . Do sit down.

(*She and* Blackshaw *sit*, Opletree *remains standing*.)

Blackshaw (*nods*). The fact is, I imagine, they can't put their hands on Nurse Prior (*laughs mysteriously*) and when your principal witness vanishes—vanishes—(*Gesture.*) To cut a long story short if you'll give 'em a hundred thousand pounds, they'll stop proceedings. Now what do you say ?

Opletree (*excitedly*). Give it them! Give it them!

Oriana. Wait a moment, Maurice. Please! (*To* Blackshaw.) How much should I have ?—I mean after the death-duties are paid ? And the costs, naturally.

Blackshaw. Over six hundred thousand.

Opletree. Of course it's nothing to do with me. It's not my money. But if you don't settle—

Oriana (*ignoring* Maurice). Supposing I refuse to settle ?

Blackshaw. Then you'll have over *seven* hundred thousand—if you win. And if you *don't* win—

Oriana. But I *should* win, shouldn't I ?

Blackshaw. You would—if it wasn't a jury case. With a judge alone you'd be quite safe. But remember on every jury there are at least four people who ought to be in a lunatic asylum.

Oriana. Then what do you advise ?

Blackshaw. Mrs. Opletree! I advise you to keep out of Court if you reasonably can. I always advise that.

ORIANA (*calmly*). Then I will settle.

OPLETREE (*superiorly*). Why of *course!*

BLACKSHAW. Very good. I have an appointment with the other side for eleven o'clock to-morrow.

OPLETREE. And that's all there is to do?

BLACKSHAW. That's all, beyond about a thousand and one formalities.

OPLETREE. But we're rich! Rich!

BLACKSHAW. Depends what you call rich. If six hundred thousand in the finest gilt-edged securities constitutes wealth, then Mrs. Opletree is rich.

(Opletree *rushes towards the door.*)

ORIANA. Where are you going like that, Maurice?

OPLETREE. I'm going to deal with that scoundrel in the morning room.

ORIANA. Please. Just one more minute. (*To* Blackshaw.) As you're here, I think we ought to confess to you. We're in the hands of the Jews. We borrowed eight hundred pounds a year ago, and what with renewals and things, we have to pay fourteen hundred to-day. I was just working out the interest. Seems something like seventy-five per cent.

BLACKSHAW. It is. And your benefactor is waiting in the next room for his modest reward? Deplorable! Deplorable! I'm bound to tell you, you've been very naughty.

OPLETREE (*his hand on the door-knob*). Anyway, does it matter ? What's done can't be undone.

BLACKSHAW. I'm not so sure. (*To* Oriana.) Hadn't you better let your father-confessor see this generous gentleman? (Oriana *rings the bell.*) Even if you were worth six millions, fourteen hundred pounds would still be fourteen hundred pounds ; and seventy-five per cent. interest still seventy-five per cent. interest. (*To* Opletree.) That's an important scientific truth.

OPLETREE (*densely*). I suppose it is.

BLACKSHAW. Yes, and it was a millionaire who first discovered it.

(*Enter* Brunton.)

ORIANA. Ask Mr. Nathan to come in here, please. (*Exit* Brunton.)

BLACKSHAW. Now Captain Opletree, all I want from you is a policy of masterly inactivity. (*With energy.*) This man is clearly a shark. Leave him to me.

(Brunton *shows in* Nathan.)

(Oriana *moves away towards the window.*)

NATHAN (*to the company*). Good afternoon.

OPLETREE. How d'ye do ? This is my solicitor, Mr. Blackshaw.

NATHAN (*surprised and cautious*). Ah yes.

BLACKSHAW (*shaking hands with* Nathan, *and with much cordiality in his voice*). Delighted to meet you, Mr. Nathan. I think we came down by the same train, but you secured the first taxi.

NATHAN (*cordially*). I don't remember seeing you on the train.

BLACKSHAW. Possibly. Now, Mr. Nathan (*looking at his watch*). I've got exactly three minutes. I take it you have a bill of sale.

NATHAN. I have.

BLACKSHAW. Did you bring it with you?

NATHAN. I did.

BLACKSHAW. May I glance at it? (Nathan *hesitates.*) I'm a professional man. (*Smiling.*) It will be entirely safe in my hands.

NATHAN. Certainly.

(Blackshaw *takes the document and rapidly reads it.*)

BLACKSHAW (*handing it back*). Just so. Now, I have a serious piece of news for you, Mr. Nathan. We can't pay you. What shall you do?

NATHAN. What *can* I do?

BLACKSHAW. Obviously you can use your powers.

NATHAN. Of course.

BLACKSHAW. And you will?

NATHAN. Of course.

BLACKSHAW. Thank you so much. That was all I wanted to know. Good-day, Mr. Nathan. (*He extends his hand.*)

NATHAN (*puzzled*). Good-day.

(*They shake hands.*)

BLACKSHAW (*casually, as* Nathan *turns away*). There was only this. Supposing that we file our

petition in bankruptcy. There are other creditors. Supposing they contest your bill of sale?

NATHAN. On what ground?

BLACKSHAW. On the ground that the contract is unreasonable and oppressive, and the rate of interest extortionate.

OPLETREE. My God! I should think it was.

BLACKSHAW. No, no! Captain Opletree. *I* don't say it's extortionate. All I say is that the other creditors might argue that it was extortionate. They'd take the matter into Court. I'm afraid a judge might be very severe indeed about seventy-five per cent. interest. He might use *his* powers. Then you'd have to share and share alike with the unsecured creditors and you'd get about fourpence in the pound.

NATHAN. I'll risk it.

BLACKSHAW. No doubt you're right. Good-bye.

NATHAN. Give me twelve hundred and I'll cry quits.

BLACKSHAW. We might raise a thousand.

NATHAN. No, I won't take it.

BLACKSHAW. I feared the sacrifice would be too great. Pardon me for suggesting it.

NATHAN. Eleven hundred.

(Blackshaw *shakes his head and looks at his watch.*)

NATHAN. Very well. A thousand.

BLACKSHAW. Thank you, Mr. Nathan. Thank you twelve hundred times. You've met us very

handsomely. (*Pointing to the writing table.*) Would you mind putting that on paper.

(Nathan *turns to the table and standing by it writes a line, then hands it to* Blackshaw.)

NATHAN. Will that do ?

BLACKSHAW. Quite. You're returning to London to-night ?

NATHAN. Yes.

BLACKSHAW. Call at my office to-morrow at twelve o'clock, will you. You and I will settle then.

NATHAN. What address ?

BLACKSHAW (*dryly*). Oh! Stanway and Blackshaw. In the 'phone book. (*Looks at his watch again.*)

NATHAN. Then you've lost Mrs. Opletree's will case, I take it.

BLACKSHAW. Oh, that! Have you heard of it ? No, it's been settled in our favour. It's not money we're short of. We have lots of money—but not to burn.

NATHAN. I've been done!

BLACKSHAW. Done ? Oh, Mr. Nathan, don't put it like that. You're still getting twenty-five per cent. Good-bye again. Unless I have the pleasure of meeting you in the up-train to-night.

(Nathan *leaves rapidly.*)

BLACKSHAW (*with something of the air of a conjurer who has successfully performed a wonderful trick*). We're four hundred pounds to the good

at any rate—(*looking at his watch*) in less than four minutes! (*To* Oriana *specially.*) Of course in dealing with sharks one has to play the game as they play it, not as we play it. The code's different.

Oriana. It was a marvellous performance.

Opletree (*moody and preoccupied*). Listen, Blackshaw. I've got to tell you. It was I who went to the Jews. My wife didn't know anything about it.

Blackshaw. Lucky Mrs. Opletree has means, my dear sir. Very lucky.

Opletree (*suddenly testy*). Oh, you needn't remind me the money's hers. I know well enough *I'm* just as poor as I was before. Look here. I think I'll leave you two to settle your affairs alone.

Oriana. Maurice, dear!

(Opletree *has picked up his cap and gone off into the garden.*)

(*A rather constrained pause.*)

Oriana. Someone was saying this afternoon that the strain of things has been a little too much for my poor Maurice's nerves. Very natural, isn't it?

Blackshaw. *You've* come through it all admirably, if I may say so.

Oriana. I'm different.

Blackshaw (*with enthusiasm*). You are amazing.

Oriana (*dreamily*). Am I?

BLACKSHAW. Well, of course. Every time I rush down here, I'm more struck by that glittering fact. And let me say that you've no greater admirer than your husband.

ORIANA. Oh, I know!

BLACKSHAW. May the father-confessor speak plainly ?

ORIANA. Please do.

BLACKSHAW. Without offence ?

ORIANA. Without any offence.

BLACKSHAW. That husband of yours will need your attention.

ORIANA. Yes ?

BLACKSHAW. Do you know what he wants ?

ORIANA. What ?

BLACKSHAW. He's short of something to do.

ORIANA. But he hunts, he shoots, he goes fishing, he goes golfing. He's simply always busy.

BLACKSHAW. That's not doing. He needs something to *do*.

ORIANA. But what can he do ?

BLACKSHAW. He ought to go into Parliament.

ORIANA. Maurice ? But surely that's not his line!

BLACKSHAW. Why not ? He's a Justice of the Peace, isn't he ?

ORIANA. Oh, yes. He's a J.P. But what's that ? Nothing at all. He's no speaker.

BLACKSHAW. Speeches have no importance. None! Only votes have importance. And he could vote as well as the best of 'em. All men are equal in the Division Lobby. And believe me, there are far less able men in the house than your husband. Yes, and scores of them! Now I saw Riggs-Falkiner driving to the station as I came up. He's going to stand.

ORIANA. Yes. He told me. But *he*'s clever.

BLACKSHAW. He's clever with women. I'm speaking freely, but then I'm your father-confessor . . . . He's a great specialist in women.

ORIANA (*thoughtful and slightly confused*). Oh!

BLACKSHAW. I'm *told* on good authority that they fall for him every time, women do. Now I don't honestly think he'd make as good an M.P. as your husband. To begin with he hasn't got a clever wife, nor a wife with thirty-five thousand a year of her own, nor *any* wife.

ORIANA. Shall I have thirty-five thousand a year ?

BLACKSHAW. You will—if you can keep your husband employed. Believe me, my dear lady, it's women like you who make or mar men. Your husband is waiting to be moulded, directed, dominated, energised. By you! A woman like you *ought* to have a husband in Parliament. It's not the M.P. that is powerful ; it's the woman behind him. You owe it to yourself and to society to become a great social and political influence.

ORIANA. You're frightening me.

BLACKSHAW. No, I'm not.

ORIANA. But I should have to live in London!

BLACKSHAW. Naturally you would have to live in London.

ORIANA. I'm always being told that my proper place is in the country—calm, peace, and all that sort of thing.

BLACKSHAW. Who tells you that ?

ORIANA. Oh, various men.

BLACKSHAW. And do you think so yourself ?

ORIANA. What a confessor you are! (*After a pause, deciding to be frank.*) I'm dying to get to London. Even when I was a girl out in Canada, I always dreamt of London—being a great hostess in London.

BLACKSHAW. Well, of course you did. It's written all over you. The idea of you vegetating in the country! Monstrous! It's cowardice—*running away from life.*

ORIANA (*in a low voice*). I shall think it over.

BLACKSHAW (*rising*). Do. I must rush off.

ORIANA. But you'll have tea.

BLACKSHAW. In the train. Good-bye. I'll telegraph to-morrow when the affair's all settled.

ORIANA (*having rung the bell*). And you! When you were a boy, did you yearn to be in London ?

BLACKSHAW. I did. And I've got there. And there's no place to touch it. Take my word.

ORIANA. And do you mean to go into politics ?

BLACKSHAW. I most certainly do. I hope we shall meet there—in politics. (Brunton *enters*.) Good-bye.

ORIANA. Good-bye. I'm so very grateful to you for everything you've done. Very!

(Blackshaw *leaves, shown out by* Brunton.)

(Oriana *picks up her needlework instinctively, looks at it, then with a sudden resolve starts folding it up*.)

(*Re-enter* Opletree *from the garden*.)

OPLETREE. Gone, has he ?

ORIANA. Yes.

(*She opens the drawer of a cabinet*.)

OPLETREE. I say, Oriana, I'm awfully sorry.

ORIANA (*sweetly*). Maurice, do you want to do something for me ?

OPLETREE. Yes, what is it ?

ORIANA. Help me to look for a very nice house in London.

(*She puts the needlework in the drawer*.)

OPLETREE. In London ?

ORIANA. In London.

OPLETREE. You mean it ?

ORIANA. Yes, I mean it.

(*She closes the drawer with a definite gesture and faces Maurice*.)

CURTAIN.

ACT II

ACT II

Scene I

The Terrace of the House of Commons.

The scene is set at an angle. The Clock Tower is at the upper right hand corner. From it, at right angles, the parapet of the Terrace runs down to the left side of the Proscenium arch. Beyond the parapet can be seen Westminster Bridge and the view of the Thames. To the right of the Tower is the wall of the House of Commons facing the river, with its entrances on to the Terrace.

It is about five o'clock of a brilliant afternoon.

The tables on the Terrace are laid for tea. Several groups of men and women are standing about or seated at the tables, chatting. Waiters are serving. One policeman in the background to the right.

Eleven years have passed. Howard Nathan, *now* Sir Howard Nathan, *enters from the right with* Georgie Dream. *He is extremely well, possibly a little too well, turned out. As for* Georgie, *one can hardly recognise the girl of* 1911, *in this self-assured, smartly gowned, successful actress,* Opletree *is with them. In spite of his town clothes, he still somehow manages to give a suggestion of the country.*

They all three come to a table down in the left hand corner.

GEORGIE. So this is what the Terrace of the House of Commons looks like—when you're on the right side of the parapet! Well, it's heavenly.

NATHAN. I shouldn't be surprised if heaven's rather different.

OPLETREE (*with a forced smile, preoccupied*). Now this is our table. Nathan. (*To* Georgie.) I shall have to ask you to excuse me for a few minutes.

GEORGIE (*smiling assent*). One of your exciting days ?

OPLETREE. Well, Blackshaw will be just finishing his speech, and I have to be on hand.

GEORGIE. You're going to speak too ?

OPLETREE. Oh no! I never speak. (*Grimly.*) But you see I'm the great Blackshaw's poodle. By the way, he asked me to say how sorry he is we couldn't get seats for you in the gallery, but it's packed out.

NATHAN. Oh, not at all, my dear fellow!

(Opletree *goes off up the terrace.*)

GEORGIE. Seems worried.

NATHAN. So would you be, my dear.

GEORGIE. Why ?

NATHAN. Why! The whole of this place is simply in a fever. The Government may tumble this very afternoon.

GEORGIE. While we're here ? How perfect!

(*A policeman approaches* Georgie *and salutes.*)

POLICEMAN (*solemnly*). Excuse me, miss, may I—(*hesitates*).

GEORGIE (*sweetly*). With pleasure! Anything! Except arrest me.

POLICEMAN. I collect autographs. If I send you a photograph of yourself and a stamped envelope to the theatre, will you sign it for me? Pardon the liberty, miss.

GEORGIE (*kindly*). Of course. Send it.

(*Policeman salutes and begins to move away.*)

GEORGIE (*winningly*). Officer. *Do* let *me* stamp the envelope.

POLICEMAN. Well, miss—

GEORGIE. Because I *adore* policemen.

POLICEMAN (*stolidly*). Thank you, miss. (*Moves back to his post.*)

GEORGIE (*to* Nathan). Howdy, haven't I just got there!

NATHAN. Well, if being the idol of the public and having your own theatre and printing your name in large letters on the sides of all the buses means getting there—

GEORGIE. But a policeman! It's too lovely!

NATHAN. Child!

GEORGIE (*sighs*). But it's taken a frightful time to get there! A frightful time!

NATHAN. Let me tell you, you put your name on to the buses a jolly sight quicker than most actresses. It's only eleven years since you and I

had that little trouble together with the barman at Ipswich.

GEORGIE. It's a life-time. Never shall I see dear old thirty again! I always said I should be over thirty one day.

NATHAN. No successful actress ever is over thirty. You always said you would get on, and, by Jove, you have got on. Are you happy or aren't you?

GEORGIE (*with enthusiasm*). Oh perfectly! Thanks to my silly old Howdy!—Are you?

NATHAN. Well, if anyone asked me to go and live in Palestine, I should probably say London was good enough.

GEORGIE. You *ought* to be happy. You're a simply dreadful swell in the City. And then there's this title! (*Teasingly.*) Sir Howard Nathan! *Sir!*

NATHAN. Yet I never see *my* name on the buses.

GEORGIE (*sharply*). Don't tease. You know I hate it.

NATHAN (*ignoring her petulance*). But I'll tell you a man who's beaten both of us. Blackshaw. Less than ten years in the House, and now he's the best speaker on his side, and one of the best known politicians in England.

(*Enter* Lord Plinlimmon, *rather like the bearer of great tidings. He is at present forty-nine, well-preserved, without a grey hair. He replies twice to questions from the tables: "Yes, he's sat down."* *Seeing* Georgie, *he stops.*)

PLINLIMMON. That isn't Miss Georgie Dream!

GEORGIE. No. It's her understudy. (*Shaking hands.*) How are you, Lord Plinlimmon? You know Sir Howard Nathan, don't you? (*The two men nod and* Nathan *rises.*) Come and sit down here for a moment. No?

PLINLIMMON. Would I refuse the chance of sitting next to the most beautiful woman on the Terrace! Would I! (*he sits.*) Not to mention the greatest actress in London.

GEORGIE. I see you have all your old skill with the trowel. You were just the same as plain Major Riggs-Falkiner.

PLINLIMMON. Not "plain," surely! Don't say I was plain.

GEORGIE. I thought you were hard at work governing Malta.

PLINLIMMON (*archly*). My dear young lady, is it possible you were unaware that, having restored Malta to a great state of prosperity, I had abandoned my governorship and returned to London to remind myself of the beauty, the charm, and the wit of the women of my native land? Also to take a hand again in politics?

NATHAN. Anything going to happen here to-day?

PLINLIMMON (*confidentially*). Everything. It's life or death to the Government.

NATHAN. Hear Blackshaw's speech?

PLINLIMMON. Part of it.

GEORGIE. Perfectly marvellous, I suppose?

PLINLIMMON. Not bad. I can't quite understand all this fuss about Blackshaw. Everyone I meet seems to think that it's *he* who is beating the Government. The situation is beating the Government.

GEORGIE. "Situation"! Sounds quite nice and theatrical. I simply love a good situation. Tell me exactly what it is.

PLINLIMMON. It's like this. The Government have sworn to reduce the National Debt—

GEORGIE. Yes, and I should think they had sworn to reduce the National Debt. They ought to be *ashamed* of it.

PLINLIMMON. Quite. But if they do, they can't take a shilling off the income tax, and Blackshaw says they must.

GEORGIE. Yes, and I should think they must! They ought to be ashamed of the income tax—*and* the super tax.

PLINLIMMON. Quite.

GEORGIE. Look at me. I make three hundred quid a week and more. But do I get it? Not me! The Chancellor of the Exchequer gets it. Do you know last year I paid that fellow in income tax and super tax as much as his blooming salary? Here he goes to sleep all day on a bench while I'm doing eight and nine shows a week, and keeping him and his wife and children too! No wonder I can't pay my debts! I owe £17 for cigarettes at this moment, but I have to pay for his long cigars!

PLINLIMMON. My dear lady. You're wasted on the stage—you ought to be in the House.

GEORGIE. If I was, I'd bring it down.

(Mrs. Blackshaw *appears on the Terrace. She is now forty-six, with a touch of grey in her hair, plumper than ever, wearing a quiet, dark gown. She is accompanied by her daughter* Doris, *now a girl of twenty-three, pretty, and dressed simply but with originality.* Edgar Dart *comes with them, a man of eight and twenty, evidently serious.*)

PLINLIMMON (*as if shot*). By heaven, who is that lovely girl ?

GEORGIE. Is she lovely ?

PLINLIMMON. She's the most attractive creature I ever saw.

GEORGIE. I thought *I* was.

PLINLIMMON. You are. But do tell me who she is.

GEORGIE. That's a friend of mine, Doris Blackshaw, daughter of *the* Blackshaw.

NATHAN. Oh! Have *you* run across the Blackshaw girl ?

GEORGIE. Charity Matinées make sisters of us all.

NATHAN. And who's the older lady ?

GEORGIE. Her mother, of course.

PLINLIMMON. And that young sprig making eyes at the girl ?

GEORGIE. That's the news editor of the "Evening Despatch." His name's Dart.

NATHAN. She hasn't bowed to you. Why don't you bow to her, Georgie?

GEORGIE. Never be in a hurry to bow to the exalted, Howdy. Makes you cheap. Now watch me, you two. I'll look round casually—then just a faint start of recognition—smile—bow. (*She does so.* Doris *bows.* Georgie *looks away from the* Blackshaw *group.*)

(*A waiter brings tea.*)

NATHAN. Pour out, Georgie, and stop your tricks.

GEORGIE (*to* Plinlimmon). You'll have some tea of course.

(Nathan, Georgie *and* Plinlimmon *become busy over their tea.*)

DART. I don't quite know what I'm here for, Mrs. Blackshaw.

DORIS. It's very simple, Edgar. Mother's fallen in love with you and she wants to show you off to father. Also to show father off to you. She hasn't been on the Terrace for ages and ages.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. No, and she feels very strange now she *is* here.

DART. So do I. The fact is, I'm nervous.

DORIS. Come, the news editor of the "Despatch" can't possibly be nervous. It's against nature. Mothers are never nervous, either.

Mrs. Blackshaw. But they have headaches.

Doris (*touching her mother*). What a shame to tease her! She shan't be teased.

(Blackshaw *is seen coming along the Terrace. He nods familiarly to, or shakes hands with, one or two people, and distantly greets others. The faces of all seem to be congratulating him on his speech. Except for the greyness of the hair at the temples and a slight increase in weight, he has changed very little physically in eleven years. His manner, however, though it is still quite simple and unaffected, shows at once that he has become a person of great importance in the world.*)

Mrs. Blackshaw. If your father doesn't come soon, I shall go home. Oh, I shall go right home. What are all these people staring at ?

Doris. They're only wondering who you are, mother.

Mrs. Blackshaw (*looking round*). Oh! Here *is* your father. Now be sure not to ask him what he thinks the result of the division will be, unless he begins. It would only worry him still more.

Doris (*to* Blackshaw, *who has now reached the table*). Now father, you've just come in time. This is mother's friend, Edgar Dart, the news editor of—

Blackshaw. Yes, I know. I've heard about Mr. Dart. (*Shaking hands*). Mother, you must ask Mr. Dart to dinner one night, when we're nice and quiet.

Dart. It's most awfully good of you, sir.

Doris (*to* Blackshaw). He only talks like that when he's nervous, Dad. He's nervous at meeting you. Mother's nervous too, because people are staring at her. And I'm nervous because of the mess you made of all those statistics I prepared for you.

Blackshaw (*laughing*). I turned over two pages at once.

Doris. Yes. I should think so!

Blackshaw. But nobody noticed anything. They never do. The speech was all right, wasn't it?

Doris (*judicially*). Well, it went down pretty well . . . .

Mrs. Blackshaw. It was a very good speech, Simon. Doris, you're forgetting your father's tea.

Dart. It was great, sir, if I may say so.

Doris. Of course you may say so. He loves to hear you say so. (*Hands a cup to* Blackshaw.)

Blackshaw (*to* Dart). We all need encouragement, don't we?

Dart. *I* do sir. Shouldn't have thought you did.

Blackshaw. Circulation of the "Despatch" a bit sticky just now, eh?

Dart. A little.

Blackshaw. When we've lopped a shilling off the Income Tax, you'll find things will improve all round.

Mrs. Blackshaw (*indicating an old gentleman*). Father! Who is that standing by that table?—I sat next to him at a concert the other night. He seemed to know me. In fact we talked. But for the life of me I couldn't think who he was.

Blackshaw. Good heavens, Maria! That's Holyoke, of course. That's our prime-minister to be, if this division goes right and the government falls.

Doris. So you might as well make up your mind to remember him, mother darling! He'll be father's chief, when father's in the Cabinet.

Mrs. Blackshaw. Nobody will ever be your father's chief, Doris. Nobody ever has been.

Blackshaw. Except you, mother.

(*The Division Bell rings.*)

(*The Policeman calls out in a loud voice "Division!" Other voices off are heard taking up the same call.*)

Blackshaw (*rising quickly*). Division bell. I must rush off and vote. Back in a few minutes.

Mrs. Blackshaw. Finish your tea first, Simon. You need it.

Blackshaw (*hastily draining his cup*). There you are, mother.

(*Several other M.P.'s leave for the division as* Blackshaw *goes away.*)

(Nathan, *who has been waiting his chance, springs up and accosts him.*)

NATHAN. One moment, Mr. Blackshaw.

BLACKSHAW. How d'you do, Nathan? How d'you do?

NATHAN. No chance of us meeting to-day, I suppose?

BLACKSHAW (*after a second's hesitation*). Yes, there is. Six-thirty at my office. That suit you?

NATHAN. Six-thirty! Perfectly. (*Sotto voce.*) Things are maturing.

BLACKSHAW. Good!

(*He goes off.*)

(Nathan *returns to his own table.*)

MRS. BLACKSHAW. And now I'm going.

DORIS. But father will expect you—

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Your father will quite understand. I can't bear this staring place any longer, with my headache.

DORIS. But aren't you like everyone else,—dying to know the result of the division?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. I know the result of the division. Your father will win. Mr. Dart, will you show me how to get to the car?

DART. With pleasure. But Miss Doris?

DORIS. You can come back for me. I must just speak to Georgie Dream.

(*They all rise.*)

(Mrs. Blackshaw *and* Dart *go off. Several couples leave.*)

PLINLIMMON (*agitated, to* Georgie). She's coming over to speak to you!

DORIS (*approaching, to* Georgie). How are you, my dear? (*They all rise.*) Don't get up, please.

GEORGIE. We're just going. (*Introducing.*) Lord Plinlimmon, Sir Howard Nathan—Miss Blackshaw.

(*They bow.*)

DORIS. You were so splendid over that matinée for St. Dunstan's—I was wondering whether I might ask you to help with another for the Islington Crêche.

GEORGIE. Come round to the theatre to-night, will you? After the second act.

DORIS. Wish I could. But I have to go to what they call a political reception—Mrs. Opletree's.

GEORGIE. Then why not one of our tea-orgies after the Matinée to-morrow?

DORIS. I shall love it.

GEORGIE (*to* Doris). Bye-bye! (*To* Plinlimmon.) Well, if I do stand for Parliament, it'll be odds on.

PLINLIMMON (*negligently humorous; interested only in* Doris). You may be in the Cabinet.

GEORGIE. "May"? They couldn't keep me out. Bye-bye.

(*They salute and separate,* Nathan *and* Georgie *going off.*)

PLINLIMMON (*impulsively intercepting* Doris *as she is moving back to her chair*). Your father made a wonderful speech, Miss Blackshaw.

DORIS (*enthusiastic in the absence of her parents*). Wonderful! Didn't miss a point, did he? I'm so proud of him.

PLINLIMMON. It's very evident that you take great care of him.

DORIS. Mother and I, you mean?

PLINLIMMON. Well, somebody does.

DORIS. Yes, we *do* take care of him. He's entirely precious, and it's our business in life to preserve him from all accidents, including himself. Because, you know, he's very like a child in some ways. All great men are.

PLINLIMMON (*enchanted by her engaging demeanour*). Well, all I say is that if you're proud of him, he must be proud of you.

DORIS. Why?

PLINLIMMON. You're marvellous. I know I oughtn't to talk like that, but I can't help it. (*Shrugs his shoulders.*) Upon my soul I can't.

(Doris *laughs. More people leave the Terrace.* Dart *returns.*)

DART (*as he approaches; familiarly, with a demeanour very different from that which he showed in the presence of Blackshaw*). I say, Doris.

DORIS. Oh! . . . . Edgar, this is Lord Plinlimmon. Mr. Edgar Dart. (*The men bow inimically.*) You got mother off safely?

DART. I did.

DORIS. I—er—Well, good-day, Lord Plinlimmon. (*She bows and moves off with* Dart *a little way.* Plinlimmon *is disappointed that she hasn't shaken hands. He is obviously jealous of* Dart.) Look here, Edgar, if the result of that division's coming along I don't want to meet father here in public. You see?

DART. Quite.

DORIS. It might be awkward—if the result's the wrong result.

DART. Let's go and catch him before he comes out.

(*They walk away up the terrace and then off to the right.* Plinlimmon *gazes after* Doris *as if spellbound. As she goes off, he follows her a step or two.*) (*At that moment* Oriana *enters. She is now thirty-six, with all the confidence acquired by an assured position in society.*)

(Plinlimmon *turns and comes face to face with her.*)

(*The rest of the people, except two couples at the other end of the terrace, leave during this scene.*)

PLINLIMMON (*saluting her rather absently, with his eyes still on* Doris). My dear Oriana—

ORIANA. Yes?

PLINLIMMON. Of course *you* know Miss Blackshaw?

ORIANA. Oh! And I thought you were going to congratulate me on my dinner the night before last.

PLINLIMMON. So I was. Splendid! Splendid!

ORIANA. Naturally I know Doris Blackshaw.

PLINLIMMON. Don't you think she's astounding? Unique?

ORIANA. Oh, my dear Plin! Another? Are you really incurable? I wonder who the next one will be after poor Doris?

PLINLIMMON (*with fire*). There won't be any next one.

ORIANA. Ah! That's what you always say.

PLINLIMMON. Pardon. I never said it before. Never! Oriana, believe me, I'm mortally wounded this time. Listen. Can't you arrange another little dinner, so that I can meet Miss Blackshaw properly?

ORIANA. You'll meet her "properly" at my reception to-night—if you come.

PLINLIMMON (*with emphasis*). I shall be there. Only one thing can stop me.

ORIANA. Can you be stopped by *anything*?

PLINLIMMON. If the Government's beaten to-day, the new Prime Minister will certainly want me.

ORIANA. Holyoke will want you?

PLINLIMMON. Of course Holyoke will want me. Good old "Cucumber." If he sends for me I can't say I'm going to a party, can I? That might make his temperature rise for once.

ORIANA (*thoughtful*). I see.

PLINLIMMON. Holyoke won't form a government without me. That's always been understood between us. And that's why I threw up Malta.

ORIANA (*more thoughtful*). I see.

PLINLIMMON. I have claims that Holyoke can't ignore. Didn't you know?

ORIANA. No.

(*Meanwhile a stir of excitement is heard, off. The result of the division is out.* Blackshaw *is seen approaching. He is less triumphant than before, but still bears himself courageously.*)

PLINLIMMON (*nervously to* Blackshaw). Your ladies have gone.

BLACKSHAW. Yes. I've just seen my daughter, thanks.

ORIANA. Well?

BLACKSHAW. The Government's won by the skin of its teeth. My motion was lost by three votes.

PLINLIMMON. Only three. My God! Good-bye. Au revoir.

(*He hurries off.*)

BLACKSHAW. I'm beaten.

ORIANA. We can't talk here.

BLACKSHAW. Why not? Everyone will keep away from me, now I'm beaten. And I was sure I'd won.

ORIANA. Of course you're not beaten. It's a moral victory for you, especially seeing it's the budget.

BLACKSHAW. My dear woman, moral victory is simply a nice word for defeat.

ORIANA. But they're bound to resign after such a blow.

BLACKSHAW. Why? No government ever resigns unless either you've given it a knock-out, or it expects to give *you* a knock-out in six months.

ORIANA. But they must be tired of power.

BLACKSHAW. No government is ever tired of power.

ORIANA. But it's dishonest of them not to resign when they know the whole country's against them.

BLACKSHAW. No government is dishonest. Every government is honestly and passionately convinced that if it falls the country will go to eternal smash.

ORIANA. You're tired and discouraged.

BLACKSHAW. I'm disappointed. I wouldn't admit it to anybody on earth but you.

ORIANA. You can say what you like, but I feel in my bones they'll resign to-night or to-morrow.

BLACKSHAW. How do you argue it out?

ORIANA. I don't argue it out. I believe in you. You won't disappoint me. You made a great speech to-day. You'll make a greater speech to-morrow.

BLACKSHAW. Shall I?

ORIANA. Of course.

BLACKSHAW. If ever a woman's faith made a man, yours has made me.

ORIANA. Don't say that. Your wife has faith in you.

BLACKSHAW. Yes, perhaps too much faith. If I told my wife the earth was flat she'd believe me.

ORIANA. Your daughter—

BLACKSHAW. My daughter! I adore the chit, because she knows everything and understands nothing. But men are not inspired by their daughters. You alone—alone—

ORIANA. Nonsense! Why, if it hadn't been for you I should never have come to London at all!

BLACKSHAW. London is *hell!*

ORIANA (*softly*). It is—sometimes, but would you get out of it if you could?

BLACKSHAW (*looking at her*). No, by God! I'm fire-proof, and I'll stick to hell.

ORIANA (*in a new tone*). I want to talk to you.

BLACKSHAW. Yes?

ORIANA. Seriously! Straight! *Very* straight!

BLACKSHAW. I'm here.

ORIANA. I'll put it shortly. It's quite settled you'll be Colonial Secretary in the next Cabinet. You'll have to neglect your business. You've made money, but you'll want more. There's no situation more awful than that of a successful statesman with a limited income.

BLACKSHAW. I've thought of that.

ORIANA (*with emotion*). We're friends. We aren't man and woman. We're friends. I've got a lot of money.

BLACKSHAW (*after a dreadful pause*). You're an angel . . . . (*Quietly but very definitely.*) But you've made a mistake.

ORIANA (*submissively*). Have I ? I only wanted your triumph. Forgive me.

BLACKSHAW (*deprecating*). Forgive you? Please!

(Opletree *re-enters rapidly from the right.*)

OPLETREE. Oh, there you are!

BLACKSHAW (*with perfect self-control*). Has Holyoke sent any message out yet ?

OPLETREE. I don't know.

BLACKSHAW. We've got to get in touch with him. You'd better come with me now.

ORIANA. Yes. You two go. (*To* Blackshaw.) See you to-night. Maurice, try not to be late,—that is if Mr. Blackshaw can spare you.

BLACKSHAW. It all depends.

ORIANA. Of course if you *can't* spare Maurice, I shall quite understand. Au revoir. (*She turns to go.*)

OPLETREE (*who has been looking from* Blackshaw *to* Oriana *with growing irritation*). One moment, Oriana. I shan't be at your show to-night. I'm off to Cowes to join the yacht.

BLACKSHAW. Not to-night ?

OPLETREE. Yes. To-night. Now.

ORIANA. But you can't leave Mr. Blackshaw at a moment like this.

OPLETREE (*excitedly*). Can't I? Can't I? I went into politics to please you. I became a poodle to please you. But I've had enough of it, ordered about, told when to go and when to come home to my own house! Ridiculous! That's what it is! Worse than ridiculous!

ORIANA. Stop, Maurice! You shall apologise to Mr. Blackshaw for that. And to me too. I insist.

BLACKSHAW (*vehemently*). It's not true!

OPLETREE (*significantly*). Isn't it?—I'm beginning to wonder.

(*He goes off, right.*)

ORIANA. Maurice!

BLACKSHAW. Let him go. He's jealous.

ORIANA. But it's an outrage! To make such monstrous insinuations!

BLACKSHAW. He's lost his head. If he'd kept on he might have said things likely to wreck this friendship of ours, and I couldn't bear that.

ORIANA (*softly*). And neither could I. It would be too dreadful!

BLACKSHAW (*meeting her glance*). Too dreadful! (*They look at each other, realising their profound affection for each other. Blackshaw averts his eyes and moves away from* Oriana. *She looks after him.*)

CURTAIN.

Scene II

Blackshaw's *office, Dover Street.*

The scene is set at an angle. On the left wall two windows look into Dover Street. On the right a door; on either side of it book-cases containing Law Reports in long sets, and other Law-books bound in calf-skin.

The office is furnished very comfortably in an up-to-date manner. Blackshaw's *writing-table stands between the two windows.*

It is seven o'clock. Through the windows comes the light of the late afternoon sun.

Blackshaw *is seated on the left side of the table,* Nathan *on the right. They have evidently had a long talk.*

Blackshaw. Now we've been—shall I say ?—exploring the ground for nearly an hour. Let us recapitulate and see exactly where we are.

Nathan. By all means. But I know exactly where *I* am.

Blackshaw. And I know where *I* am. But it's just as well to make sure we're both standing on the same hill-top. You have obtained absolute control of the *Daily Messenger.*

Nathan. I've bought fifty-two per cent. of the shares. Therefore the holders of the other

forty-eight per cent. will have to do as I tell 'em, whether they like it or not. That's what's called Company law.

BLACKSHAW. Quite! And you invite me to dictate the political policy of the paper?

NATHAN. That's what it comes to.

BLACKSHAW. What it "comes to"? No. That's what it *is*.

NATHAN. That is what it is.

BLACKSHAW. No matter what my policy may be?

NATHAN. No matter what your policy may be.

BLACKSHAW. There are no conditions?

NATHAN. There are no conditions.

BLACKSHAW (*with humour*). You won't come and say to me, "See here, Blackshaw, I didn't bargain for any of this damned Bolshevism in my paper?" Or, "Look here, Blackshaw, my circulation's dropping, and you must look lively and get up some red-hot political stunt?"

NATHAN. I swear it.

BLACKSHAW. For all political purposes the direction of the paper is mine.

NATHAN. Practically.

BLACKSHAW. Ah! I was afraid we weren't standing on the same hill-top. When one says that a thing is "practically" so-and-so, it means that the thing is in fact *not* so-and-so.

NATHAN. I withdraw "practically." For all political purposes the direction of the *Messenger* is yours. I want it to be yours. My whole idea is that it shall be yours. In these days every first-rate statesman must have (*a*) Two alternative and contradictory policies, in case one fails to please. (*b*) A low handicap at golf. (*c*) A tame daily paper on the end of a string. The modern method is to teach the mob to read not what *it* wants but what *you* want. This is called progress.

BLACKSHAW. I should have called it cynicism.

NATHAN. Am I right or am I wrong?

BLACKSHAW (*clearing his throat, and authoritatively ignoring the last question*). That settles the newspaper matter. Now we come to finance. You are admitted to be one of the very greatest authorities on investment in the City to-day.

NATHAN (*naively*). I think I've proved it in my own person in the last ten years or so, haven't I?

BLACKSHAW (*nodding*). And you've very good-naturedly offered me your advice. As riches go these days I'm a poor man. A new government may be formed to-morrow. It's bound to be formed very soon. I shall be in the Cabinet.

NATHAN. Of course.

BLACKSHAW. I'm the chief brain now of the firm of Stanway and Blackshaw, and I shall be forced to neglect the business. I've saved £20,000. You kindly suggest that I should put the money into your British Unified Collieries, Limited, and you give me your personal assurance

that, what with new machinery and new organisation, the dividends cannot be less than twenty per cent., and that the value of the shares is bound to rise.

NATHAN. Rise very considerably.

BLACKSHAW. As regards this Company you are putting me in on the ground floor.

NATHAN. The basement.

BLACKSHAW. Good! Good! And you want my decision on these matters at once.

NATHAN. It's essential.

BLACKSHAW (*completely changing his tone*). You shall have my decision. I decline both propositions.

NATHAN. You decline them!

BLACKSHAW. Absolutely! Sir Howard, when we first met,—eleven years ago, was it?—you were lending money at seventy-five per cent. Whatever you are now, you were a usurer then, and your immense fortune has been founded on usury. I defeated you then and you've remembered your defeat to this day. It has rankled. People like you have long memories. You know how to wait. But I also have a long memory and I also have known how to wait. I've listened quietly to all you had to say, because I was very curious to see how far you would go in pretending to offer me something for nothing. But I now have the pleasure of informing you that it is not my

intention to become the tool of any money-lending Jew in Christendom. No! Nor of any man on earth!

NATHAN (*softly*). Mr. Blackshaw! Mr. Blackshaw!

BLACKSHAW. It only remains for you to go.

NATHAN (*softly, settling back firmly in his chair*). But I'm not going. (*He takes out a cigar-case.*) Cigar?

BLACKSHAW (*ignoring the offer*). You think I can't throw you out?

NATHAN. Not at all! I think that although at the moment you're suffering from an attack of righteous indignation, you'll have the decency to listen to me as quietly as I've listened to you. Even a Jew is entitled to fair treatment from a Gentile. (*He lights his cigar.*)

BLACKSHAW (*sitting; tranquillised in spite of himself by* Nathan's *gentle calmness; after a pause*). Well?

NATHAN. First as to that little affair of eleven years ago. I bear you *no* grudge over it. On the contrary I'm grateful to you. You taught me a lesson, and one of the Jew's best qualities is that he's always ready to learn. Anglo-Saxons never learn.

BLACKSHAW. What lesson did I teach you?

NATHAN. Never to take a penny less than I'm legally entitled to. That lesson cost me exactly four hundred pounds. It was cheap. Next as to the newspaper.

BLACKSHAW. Well, as to the newspaper. You're a millionaire. I'm a recognised enemy of vested interests. My politics are, and must be, utterly opposed to your politics, and yet you go through the farce of offering me full control of the political side of a newspaper which you own.

NATHAN. Pardon me. Your politics are *not* opposed to my politics.

BLACKSHAW. Oh!

NATHAN. I have no politics. No Jew has. Another of the Jew's good qualities. I merely want my paper to prosper. I have a firm belief in your future. A tremendous belief. You are to be Colonial Secretary in the new Cabinet. I'm convinced that you will make a career. You'll succeed, and my paper will succeed with you. Give me the big circulation, and you can have the politics, all of 'em. Politics are a game for children, my dear sir.

BLACKSHAW. That's where you're wrong. My politics are my religion.

NATHAN. And yet, Mr. Blackshaw, you aren't quite such an out-and-outer as you imagine yourself to be. If you were, I should give you a very wide berth indeed. You understand as well as any Jew the virtue of compromise and the value of opportunism.

BLACKSHAW. What do you mean ?

NATHAN. What about your motion to-day ? If you'd been a Bolshy, you'd have wanted to put half-a-crown on to the super-tax instead of taking a shilling off the income-tax.

BLACKSHAW. A low income-tax means expansion of trade. Expansion of trade means more employment. Moreover the first thing, the essential preliminary, is to get the present government out.

NATHAN (*calmly, puffing at his cigar*). Quite! Quite! And now for the usury. You are a lawyer! No offence! No offence! I'm a Jew; you're a lawyer. Half of your practice is money-lending. Mortgages, of course. Still—money-lending! Do you ever take less interest than the borrower will pay? Now do you?

BLACKSHAW. No.

NATHAN. Neither *did* I, nor *do* I. And no banker in London does. Only it happens that I would lend money on *some* terms, where you wouldn't lend money on *any* terms. That's the main difference between Jews and lawyers. My financial record is open for anybody to inspect, and it's absolutely clean.

BLACKSHAW. I've never denied that, Sir Howard.

NATHAN. Thank you. Finally as regards my offer of an investment. Can't you see that I really *want* you to be rich. What is a Cabinet Minister without a good private income? I won't tell you what he is. It might annoy you. But I'll tell you what he isn't. He is not independent. I *want* you to be independent, because if you're independent you'll succeed better and quicker. It costs *me* nothing to offer you a good investment

. . . That's all. (*Rising.*) Good-day. And my very best wishes for your success.

BLACKSHAW (*rising*). Good-day. (*He holds out his hand. They shake hands.* Nathan *moves firmly towards the door.*) I say, Nathan.

NATHAN (*not turning*). Yes ?

BLACKSHAW. I think I've been unfair to you.

NATHAN (*turning*). Now please, please don't apologise.

BLACKSHAW (*drily*). No, I wasn't going to. But I'll admit that though it's for your own ends you want me to be independent, you do honestly want me to be independent.

NATHAN. That is so. And how can you be independent without the sort of help I'm offering ? Suppose you get office—with your salary and the interest on your little £20,000, you may manage —just. But you won't be in office for ever, perhaps not for more than a year or two. What shall you do then ? Chuck politics ? Go back to your business ? Or do you mean to gamble on the Stock Exchange ?

BLACKSHAW. Um! (*Walking about.*)

NATHAN. Facts have to be faced.

BLACKSHAW (*stopping and facing him*). Well, I was wrong to refuse. I accept.

NATHAN. If I may say so, you're very wise. But then you *are* wise.

BLACKSHAW (*drily*). Am I! Let's hope so. Anyhow I accept.

NATHAN. I've only got one suggestion to make.

BLACKSHAW. Yes ?

NATHAN. Have you anybody you can trust—not too closely connected with you ?

BLACKSHAW. Why ?

NATHAN (*insistently*). Have you ?

BLACKSHAW. Er—yes—well, there's a fellow named Ezra Pidduck, who bought my old business down in Bursley years ago.

NATHAN. It might be as well for me to put those coal shares in his name—not yours. For the present at any rate.

BLACKSHAW (*again suspicious ; sharply.*) But why ?

NATHAN (*soothingly*). Now! Now! It's all right. Don't let me have to begin all over again. Leave it to me. A future Cabinet Minister can't be too discreet.

(*He goes off, left.*)

(Blackshaw *stands by his desk thinking.*)

CURTAIN.

Scene III

Mrs. Opletree's *House in Carlton Gardens.*

A large reception-room with a row of open arches at the back leading to a marble staircase which descends to the ground floor. Double-doors right and left leading into further rooms, the one left being apparently the dining-room, the one right, the ball-room.

The room is richly decorated in marble and gold and furnished sparsely with a few fine pieces of furniture. It is about one o'clock in the morning and the reception and dance is drawing to a close. Music still comes from the ball-room.

There are a good number of guests.

Oriana, *in a magnificent gown, stands near the archway right, at the top of the stairs, shaking hands with a couple who depart. Another couple approach her to say good-night.*

Oriana (*shaking hands with them*). Must you really ? It's only a little after one o'clock. Well I won't let you go without telling you I should have been *seriously* disappointed if anything had stopped you from coming. Good-night. *Good*-night!

(*The couple disappear down the stairs.*)

(Oriana *advances towards* Lady Coningsby, *a very old dowager, rather deaf, and with a lisp.*)

ORIANA. Lady Coningsby, wherever you are you're always the youngest woman present.

LADY CONINGSBY (*laughing*). My dear! Who were those people?

ORIANA. I was just trying to think.

LADY CONINGSBY. Eh?

ORIANA (*in a humorous, carefully articulated whisper*). I was just trying to think.

LADY CONINGSBY. My dear, I must be off.

ORIANA. No. Those who arrive late must stay late.

LADY CONINGSBY (*shaking her head*). But before I go—where is this remarkable Mr. Blackshaw of yours?

ORIANA (*pointing to beyond the archway*). Over there, talking to the Duke.

LADY CONINGSBY. Take me to him and introduce us. I am told he is sure to be Prime Minister one day. I have shaken hands with every Prime Minister for seventy years past, Lord Palmerston, Lord John Russell, Lord Derby, Mr. Disraeli, Mr. Gladstone, Lord Rosebery, Lord Salisbury, Mr. Balfour, Mr. Asquith.

ORIANA. Lord Palmerston? Impossible!

LADY CONINGSBY (*nods vigorously*). Yes, and if your Mr. Blackshaw is going to be Prime Minister, it will be a great satisfaction to me, wherever I may be, to think that I have shaken hands with him.

ORIANA. I know he'll be very proud. Let us face him hand in hand. (*She takes* Lady Coningsby's *hand.*)

(Oriana *and* Lady Coningsby *go through the archway and disappear to the right.*)

(*The music has ceased, and a few couples come from the ball-room right, and cross to the dining room ; among them are* Doris *and* Plinlimmon.)

PLINLIMMON. You're a wonderful dancer.

DORIS. I had a wonderful partner.

PLINLIMMON. What do you call that new thing you showed me ?

DORIS. The Darkie's Dip. Rather tricky, isn't it ?

PLINLIMMON. With any other woman I should never have got through it. You'll give me the next, won't you ?

DORIS. Oh! So you think three dances running aren't enough!

PLINLIMMON (*emphatically*). I do!

DORIS. Afraid I'm engaged for the next.

PLINLIMMON. Can't you chuck ? After all I ought to have known you years ago. I've got to make up for lost time.

DORIS. Chuck ? You mean jilt ?

PLINLIMMON. No. Postpone. Only postpone.

DORIS. How should *you* like to be postponed ?

PLINLIMMON. Ah! But I'm different. Think of the difficulty I had in getting here at all to-night.

Remember that I came solely and exclusively to meet you. Remember that I might be called away at any moment. My case is serious.

Doris. Is it? Very well. I'll chuck, jilt and postpone.

Plinlimmon. How splendid! I simply can't thank you. You don't know how serious my case *is*.

Doris. From what I hear your case is serious about once a week.

Plinlimmon. But now it's seriously serious—for the first time.

Doris. I'm rather doubtful.

Plinlimmon. Look into my eyes and you won't be. (*The music begins again.*) Shall we go?

Doris. I feel guilty.

Plinlimmon. Glorious! That will add to the pleasure of it.

(*They move towards the ball-room.*)

(*Enter* Dart *from the ball-room.*)

Dart. Ah! There you are. Ours, I think.

Doris (*feigning surprise*). Is it? I'm so sorry. I quite forgot, and I've promised this one to Lord Plinlimmon. What about the next?

Dart. I'm engaged for the next.

Doris. Then the one after?

Dart. I'm engaged for that too. And it's the last.

Doris. You couldn't chuck?

DART. *I* don't chuck.

DORIS (*with a very slight touch of temper*). Oh, very well then. (*More softly.*) I'm sorry.

PLINLIMMON (*who has hitherto kept a little apart, joining in with a brilliant air, to* Doris). The dance is a necklace, and we're losing pearl after pearl.

(*He is about to turn away with* Doris *when the* Butler *enters by the archway, right.*)

BUTLER. Beg pardon, my lord; your lordship is wanted on the telephone.

PLINLIMMON (*impatiently*). Who wants me on the telephone ?

BUTLER. Mr. Holyoke's secretary, my lord. He says it is very urgent.

PLINLIMMON (*to* Doris; *at once excited and dejected*). I am positively desolated! (*To* Butler.) Ask him to ring me up again in ten minutes . . . . (*Throwing up his hands ; to the group.*) No, no! I shall have to speak to him at once.

(*Exit downstairs, with an appealing gesture to* Doris.)

(*The* Butler *follows him.*)

DORIS (*to* Dart). So we can have this one after all!

DART (*grimly*). Yes—if we care to have it.

DORIS (*with provocative exaggerated sweetness*). *Do* we care to have it ?

DART (*with temper*). I suppose so. But I'm not going to say that I enjoy being treated as a makeshift.

DORIS. Now you've lost your temper. Run away and find it. No man can dance without his temper.

DART (*controlling himself*). See here, Doris. I'm sorry. But I was so looking forward to to-night. I hardly knew a soul here except you. Of course I couldn't leave the office till nearly midnight, and ever since I came you've been dancing with that fellow Plinlimmon.

DORIS. Instead of devoting myself to that fellow Dart!

DART (*angry again*). I beg pardon. *Lord* Plinlimmon.

DORIS (*still teasing*). Yes. I've danced three dances one after another with " the fellow."

DART. Yes, you have.

DORIS. Nothing escapes you.

DART. It doesn't.

DORIS. So the latest is that a girl can't choose her own partners. I must remember in future.

DART. Certainly she can. But once she's chosen, she ought to stick by her choice—not throw him over because another man happens to be—

DORIS (*with unceasing irony*). A peer of the realm. I always suspected I was a horrid little snob, and now I know it. How you must despise me! And how justly! (*She curtsies to him.*) Say it! Say it!

DART. Say what ?

DORIS. "Oh hell!" (*She laughs gaily.*)

(Oriana, Blackshaw *and* Lady Coningsby *have appeared on the right.* Lady Coningsby *bids good-bye and goes downstairs. The other two approach* Doris *and* Dart.)

BLACKSHAW. You seem to be having a pretty good time.

DORIS. We *are!* Aren't we, Edgar?

DART. Immense, sir.

ORIANA. I'm so glad!

DORIS. What a shame mother had one of her headaches!

ORIANA. Poor thing! Do give her a kind message from me, will you. (*Perceiving a mother and daughter on their way out, and going towards them.*) You aren't leaving us, Mrs. Mountaspen?

(*The two talk.*)

DORIS (*hastening to the daughter*). Joan, one moment. About that concert.

(*The two talk.*)

BLACKSHAW (*to* Dart). Wonderful place this!

DART (*looking round*). Magnificent!

BLACKSHAW. I didn't mean the house. I meant the hospitality.

DART. Quite! I've never been here before. It was awfully nice of Mrs. Opletree to ask me.

BLACKSHAW. Don't forget that the news editor of the *Despatch* is a man of influence.

DART. Oh! But I've had the job such a short time, sir . . . . I suppose there *is* a certain amount of influence attached to it.

BLACKSHAW (*confidentially*). I don't want to be indiscreet—

DART. Oh, please!

BLACKSHAW (*treating him as an equal*). I'll ask you a question. Don't answer it if you prefer not to. (*A gesture from the flattered* Dart.) With regard to your position on the *Evening Despatch*.

DART. Yes?

BLACKSHAW. Scarcely *your* particular shade of politics, is it, (*with a touch of satire*) that mighty organ?

DART. It isn't. But one has to live, sir.

BLACKSHAW (*smiling*). That's always our first duty, isn't it? (*Confidentially again.*) You bound to them for a long time?

DART. I'm on three month's trial. At the end of that, I'm free to walk out, and they're free to kick me out. Two months have gone.

BLACKSHAW. Open to an offer? Good offer?

DART. Well, naturally, sir.

BLACKSHAW. You mean it?

DART. Of course, sir.

BLACKSHAW. Could you drop in at my office the day after to-morrow?

DART. I should be delighted, sir.

BLACKSHAW. I might have a proposal to lay before you.

DART. You're too good, sir, What time ?

BLACKSHAW. Noon ? That suit you ?

DART. I shall be there, sir.

(*The mother and daughter having left*, Oriana *and* Doris *return to the two men.*)

DORIS (*imitating her father*). "You two seem to be having a pretty good time." Edgar's grown quite cheerful. How *do* you do it, dad ?

BLACKSHAW. You must come along home, chit.

ORIANA. She'll do nothing of the kind. Nor you either. We shall be by ourselves soon, except that Mr. Holyoke is coming.

BLACKSHAW. Holyoke ? To-night ? Here ?

ORIANA. Why not here ?

BLACKSHAW (*excited, but keeping his tone calm and light*). You're the most amazing and miraculous of all hostesses past, present, and to come. Holyoke's been invisible—for all of us—ever since this afternoon. And now you summon him out of the void!

ORIANA. Mrs. Mountaspen (*indicating by a gesture towards the staircase that* Mrs. Mountaspen *is the lady who has just left*) told me that she happened to see him at ten o'clock, and he told her he should get here some time—even if Empires fell.

BLACKSHAW. Where did *she* see him ?

ORIANA. At the Opera.

BLACKSHAW. Good God! No wonder I couldn't lay hands on him.

(Oriana *moves away to say good-bye to parting guests.*)

(Plinlimmon *comes upstairs hurriedly and joins* Doris.)

PLINLIMMON (*with false ease, to* Doris). I suppose "our" dance is over.

DART (*quickly and challengingly*). Yes, Lord Plinlimmon.

DORIS (*enjoying the mutual jealousy between the two men, but perceiving the danger of* Dart's *mood*). I'm going home now.

PLINLIMMON. Oh no!

DORIS. Father has told me to. He is staying, but his child is ordered to bed.

PLINLIMMON. I'm off too. May I drive you home?

DORIS. Thank you very much. (*With a heavenly peace-making smile at* Dart.) But Mr. Dart will do that.

DART (*delighted*). Certainly.

DORIS (*giving her father a pat*). Dad!

BLACKSHAW. Good-night, my dear!

DORIS. Good-night, Lord Plinlimmon.

PLINLIMMON (*hesitatingly*). I—er—I want to write to you.

DORIS. Is that all?

PLINLIMMON. I shall.

DORIS (*with a smile*). Do!

(Doris *bows and moves over to* Oriana, *who is near the archway. There she says good-night to her.* Dart, *who has shaken hands with* Blackshaw *and nodded to* Plinlimmon, *follows her. In another moment* Doris *and* Dart *go down the stairs.*)

(*Meanwhile* Plinlimmon *turns to* Blackshaw.)

PLINLIMMON (*in a casual tone, awkwardly*). Seen anything of old Cucumber Holyoke to-night?

BLACKSHAW. No. Have you?

PLINLIMMON. No!—Wonder where he's been keeping himself cool?

BLACKSHAW. I wonder.

(*A pause.*)

PLINLIMMON. Strange fellow, Cucumber! But a great man, you know.

(*A pause.*)

BLACKSHAW. Addicted to music, I believe.

(Oriana, *having taken leave of* Doris *and* Dart *now returns to* Plinlimmon *and* Blackshaw.)

PLINLIMMON. Look here, Oriana. No one would ever think of hiding anything from you. And Blackshaw must know too. I had a mind to go off without telling you, but that would have been absurd.

ORIANA (*lightly*). Worse than absurd, if the news is interesting.

PLINLIMMON. The Government's going to resign to-morrow morning. That's definite.

ORIANA. Well, of course.

BLACKSHAW. How have you heard?

PLINLIMMON. On the 'phone. Holyoke's secretary's just told me. Friend of mine. And that isn't all.

BLACKSHAW. Oh ?

PLINLIMMON. No. He's begun to form his Cabinet. I'm to have the Colonies.

BLACKSHAW (*agitated, but coldly*). You're to have the—

PLINLIMMON. Well, he agreed I have a strong claim. My experience in Malta . . . . My grandfather you know . . . . I feel damned awkward, but I preferred you should have it from me.

BLACKSHAW (*in spite of himself*). Your grandfather did so well as Colonial Secretary—it follows that *you* will also. Logical enough. (*Regaining his self-control, with effort.*) My dear Plinlimmon, I congratulate you.

ORIANA. So do I, Plin. Of course.

PLINLIMMON. If you'll excuse me, Oriana, I think I'll depart. Good-night.

ORIANA. I won't keep you. You'll have things to see to, won't you ?

(Plinlimmon *nods adieu to* Blackshaw, Oriana *says good-night to him. He goes*, Blackshaw stands *transfixed.*)

ORIANA (*returning to* Blackshaw). It's incredible!

BLACKSHAW. In politics nothing is incredible. That's the lesson I've learned.

ORIANA. Perhaps it's not true.

BLACKSHAW. He'd scarcely invent it. No! It's true enough. I never did trust Holyoke.

ORIANA. Oh, but really—

BLACKSHAW. Well, the proof of the pudding!

ORIANA. Who *are* his intimates ?

BLACKSHAW. Holyoke's ? I thought I was one of them. We've talked for hours together. Hours! *Most* intimately! I always understood that I was to have the Colonies.

ORIANA. Did he promise it to you ?

BLACKSHAW. When you've been in politics for forty years you never promise. You imply. You assume. You take it for granted. You nod. You pat on the shoulder. But promise—! There are two words in the English language that Holyoke has not used for a quarter of a century. Yes, and No.

ORIANA. I always knew Plinlimmon was clever, but he's cleverer than I suspected.

BLACKSHAW. He's very clever. He started in early, Plinlimmon did. He secured the right grandfather. I tell you there's been a vast intrigue going on behind my back. I'm an intruder, that's what I am. I've done more than anybody to scatter the enemy. They always put *me* up if they thought the House would be awkward. But when it comes to office, I'm an intruder, and the entire gang has conspired to keep me out. That's politics, that is. That's what I came to London for, the spiritual home of the crooked!

ORIANA. But you're bound to be offered something else.

BLACKSHAW. In the Cabinet? What? Lord President? He'll take that himself. Lord Chancellor? Home Office? Exchequer? Foreign Secretary? They're all bespoke, and well we know it . . . . Chancellor of the Duchy, perhaps. I see myself! (*With a hard laugh.*) I wonder what Nathan will think when he hears that the political director of his powerful newspaper has been—quietly dropped.

(*The musicians, five in number, come out of the ball-room carrying their instruments, and pass under the arch on their way downstairs. The last one closes the doors behind him.* Oriana *nods amiably to them as they go, and they bow, some with perfect aplomb, others awkwardly.*)

ORIANA (*for the musicians to hear*). Everyone was agreed they played the "Darkie Dip" marvellously. (*A pause.*)

(*Then a humorous voice is heard below on the stairs. "Ah! Mr. Saxophone. Good evening. If I could play your formidable instrument, I would retire from politics." A brief murmur of conversation follows.*)

BLACKSHAW (*very excited, whispering*). It's Holyoke!

ORIANA. Hsh—hsh!

BLACKSHAW. That's his laugh! (*Starting up, infuriated*). Now you shall see something! I'll tell him what he's never been told before in all his life.

ORIANA (*interrupting him*). Please!

BLACKSHAW. Somebody ought to say it, and by God I'll say it now!

ORIANA (*softly*). Let me be mistress here for a few minutes longer.

BLACKSHAW. But I tell you I—

ORIANA (*touching him*). Please!—

BLACKSHAW (*collapsing*). I'm sorry.

ORIANA. Go into the dining room and smoke a cigarette. Leave me alone with him. I want to talk to him.

BLACKSHAW (*kindling again*). Hide myself? I won't!

ORIANA (*calmly*). Simon Blackshaw! But I've asked you to go into the dining room!

(Blackshaw *hesitates, looks at her, then turns and goes off by the door left.*)

(Winfred Holyoke *appears at the top of the stairs, accompanied by the* Butler, *who announces him and then goes downstairs again.*)

(Holyoke *is a man of sixty-seven, tall and slim, white-haired, with a strong, humorous face.*)

ORIANA (*going to meet him*). This is *very* nice of you!

(*They shake hands.*)

HOLYOKE. So glad I didn't miss the Fifth Avenue Five. (*They sit.*) By the way, have you ever tried to play the saxophone?

ORIANA (*smiling*). Not that I remember.

HOLYOKE. You'd never forget it if you had. I've tried. Do you know it's the very deuce? But I mean to learn it after my next resignation.

ORIANA. I hear you were at the Opera to-night.

HOLYOKE. Hidden, except when I ran in and ran out. You got my message, then?

ORIANA. I was highly flattered.

HOLYOKE. I expected to find you *nearly* alone. I didn't hope to find you *quite* alone. I came because you're one of the few political wire-pullers to whom I can say the startling things I really think. Hypocrisy is rather exhausting at my age.

ORIANA. Me, a political wire-puller!

HOLYOKE. Yes, my dear child.

ORIANA. Then start right in, please, and tell me some of the things you really think. Not all of them, but a few of the worst. Why did you go to the Opera?

HOLYOKE. Music inspires me.

ORIANA. To make Cabinets?

HOLYOKE (*nods*). And you know, they don't like it! They think I'm quaint! They tell me nobody else in the history of England ever went to the Opera to make cabinets. As if that was my fault! Some of the big-wigs, those who atone by pomposity for a lack of humour, think that they ought always to be buzzing round me with advice while I'm engaged on the most difficult work that a statesman ever had to do.

ORIANA. Then you do think it is difficult?

HOLYOKE. Well, my colleagues are so damned human. Otherwise it would be easy enough. I should just choose the best man for each place, and that would be the end of it. But oh no! This simple process doesn't suit them at all. They always say there are "other considerations."

ORIANA. And how far have you got up to now?

HOLYOKE. Oh! I've finished it. Luckily Wagner's operas are long enough for any cabinet-maker. The fact is I only had one really troublesome problem. And that was our admirable friend, Unsimple Simon, as I call him in my dreams.

ORIANA. Mr. Blackshaw!

HOLYOKE. Yes. It's a case of Simon and our arch big-wig—shall I describe him as X? Well, X declines to join a cabinet which includes Simon.

ORIANA. But why?

HOLYOKE. He says it's because Simon has no genuine respect for the rights of property. But the real reason is he doesn't like the shape of Simon's collars. Fact, I assure you! Now I *could* say to X, "You needn't join a cabinet that includes Simon. You can remain outside."

ORIANA. That seems sound.

HOLYOKE. It seems sound but it isn't. I can't afford to lose X, because X is so inordinately respectable, and what my cabinet gravely lacks is respectability. I'm not respectable myself. I

play the violin. No, I must have a very strong dose of respectability, and that's why I've thrown Simon over.

ORIANA (*quietly*). You actually *have* thrown him over ?

HOLYOKE. Well, between ourselves—I've almost decided to.

ORIANA. Then who is to have the Colonies ?

HOLYOKE. Plinlimmon. A mere mountebank, but he's liked, and his collars are beyond criticism. I shall give Simon either the Duchy or—say—Pensions. But of course he won't be in the cabinet. What do you say ?

ORIANA. I expect you're quite right.

HOLYOKE (*disturbed*). You do ?

ORIANA. You see Mr. Blackshaw is not specially fitted for the Colonies. You only promised him the Colonies because there was nothing else available.

HOLYOKE. Not specially fitted ? How absurd! All you have to do is to leave the Colonies alone. Same for every Ministry. If they'd only sit tight instead of trying to do things. Give me a dozen first-rate clerks and I'd undertake to run all the departments myself, and inside three years the public would think the millenium had arrived. But of course, that would be too simple for 'em.

ORIANA. There's another thing against Blackshaw. He's just got full control of the *Daily Messenger*, and you hate newspapers.

HOLYOKE. The *Messenger!* The dickens he has!

ORIANA. It's going to be his organ—politically.

HOLYOKE (*a pause*). I say, my dear, you're wrong in saying I *promised* the Colonies to Blackshaw.

ORIANA. Am I?

HOLYOKE. Oh, quite! But I've got an idea. After all, why *should* I bother about respectability? I've only a few years left. Why shouldn't I live dangerously, and announce Blackshaw as Colonial Secretary. There'd be the most sublime trouble! We might not last, but what a time we should have! Eh?

ORIANA. Do you really want my advice?

HOLYOKE. Not at all. I simply want you to confirm me in my new bright idea.

ORIANA. But that's what I was going to do.

HOLYOKE. You have more political insight than any other woman in London. I'll do it.

ORIANA. Do you mean it?

HOLYOKE. Yes.

ORIANA. You won't change your mind.

HOLYOKE. No. Good-night. (*He rises.*)

ORIANA. You aren't going already!

HOLYOKE. I am. I only came to hear myself talk out loud. It helps (*Gravely.*) *You* know that I'm a very serious man—with a strong sense of the comic in life.

ORIANA (*gravely.*) I do know. (*A pause.*) Will you do me a favour ?

HOLYOKE. What is it ?

ORIANA. Allow me to be the first to tell Mr. Blackshaw ?

HOLYOKE. Tell him.

ORIANA. You are kind.

HOLYOKE. It isn't that I'm kind. It's that you are charming. (*With meaning.*) I always want to please you.

ORIANA. What do you mean ?

HOLYOKE. Nothing. Good-night. (*He goes up to the archway, turns and says humorously.*) You now see how Empires are governed!

ORIANA (*with a mysterious smile*). Good-night again.

(Holyoke *goes downstairs.*)

(Oriana *stands still a second as she listens to his footsteps.*)

(Blackshaw *re-enters from the door, left.*)

BLACKSHAW. Did I hear him going already ?

(Oriana *nods.*)

BLACKSHAW. Well ? What had he got to say for himself ?

(Oriana *hesitates, then approaches* Blackshaw.)

ORIANA (*softly and mysteriously*). Wait a moment. Will you let yourself out ?

BLACKSHAW. Of course.

(Oriana *presses a bell, then goes through the archway, leans over the balustrade of the staircase and looks down.*)

ORIANA. Curry. (*A silence.*) Curry!

BUTLER (*from below*). Madam?

ORIANA. You needn't wait up, any of you. Mr. Blackshaw will let himself out. Put out the lights except the one in the hall.

BUTLER. Very good, madam.

(*A pause. The lights below are extinguished.* Oriana *goes to the switchboard and extinguishes all the lights in the apartment except one chandelier.*) (*The room assumes an air of intimacy.*)

BLACKSHAW (*agitated*). And now?

ORIANA (*with a sigh*). Let me sit down. (*She sits.*) I'm authorised to tell you myself that you will be Colonial Secretary.

BLACKSHAW (*amazed*). But how did you—?

ORIANA. I didn't. I didn't do anything. He hadn't actually given the Colonies to Plin, but he was going to, and I suppose he'd told his secretary so. Evidently he was disturbed in his mind about it—because he felt he'd be breaking faith with you. He *wanted* not to have Plinlimmon and he *wanted* to have you. He was simply exquisite.

BLACKSHAW (*joyous and charitable*). I'm sure he was. Holyoke's a straight fellow enough . . . . But all this will mean the most frightful ructions. It'll mean a regular split.

ORIANA. He knows that, but he'll rather enjoy it. He said he prefers to "live dangerously."

BLACKSHAW (*passionately*). *You* did it all!

ORIANA. I assure you, No! He'd have done it in any case.

BLACKSHAW. *You* did it. It's you who have saved me! Do you remember years ago I said to you that it wasn't the politician that mattered but the woman behind him? You were in the country then, and I'd only just left the country. London was the irresistible magnet for both of us. And now London is ours—Angel, what's the matter?

ORIANA. It's only the reaction. I feel so tired —now that it's all over.

BLACKSHAW (*smiling at her*). My dear! You mustn't say "all over." Why, it's only the beginning.

ORIANA. Oh, I know. I know. It's going to be wonderful for you.

BLACKSHAW. And for you too.

ORIANA (*self-depreciating*). Oh—for *me!*

BLACKSHAW (*sitting by her side*). Tell me what happened finally between you and Maurice.

ORIANA. I failed. I only made things worse. He's gone off to the yacht after all, and God knows when I shall see him again.

BLACKSHAW. Then you're alone now. (Oriana *nods.*) And it's because of me.

ORIANA. No, not you. London. London finished it all long since. To-day was only the final break. I've been alone for years.

BLACKSHAW. So have I.

ORIANA. Have you ?

BLACKSHAW. Oriana, we can't go on like this —just friends. I want you, Oriana. Without you everything else would be dust and ashes.

ORIANA. Oh, Simon!

BLACKSHAW. It's fate. We've been alone for years, but for years fate has been bringing us nearer and nearer to each other. It began ages ago down there in the country. Do you remember?

ORIANA. Every word!

BLACKSHAW. Gradually fate has been making me stronger to serve you, and you lovelier to inspire me and wiser to help me. And now—! The moment has come! The work of destiny is completed. Angel, I love you!

ORIANA. I'm afraid.

BLACKSHAW. No! You are brave. I tell you if we aren't brave now we shall regret it ever afterwards. What did Holyoke say ? Let us live dangerously.

ORIANA (*surrendering*). Simon!

(*They embrace.*)

CURTAIN.

ACT III

ACT III

Scene I

Blackshaw's *room at the Colonial Office.*

A square lofty room with a door left, leading to the hall. At the back centre, between book-cases, a smaller door leads to the secretary's room. A fireplace on the wall, right. Right centre, a large writing-desk with a chair to the right of it. Another chair to the left of this desk. At the back centre a sofa. To the left, by the hall door, a large globe. Portraits and engravings of former Ministers of the Colonies on the walls.

A year has elapsed. It is about four o'clock in the afternoon on a day in June.

Marshal, Blackshaw's *private secretary, is standing near the writing-table. He is a man of forty-five, clean shaven, with refined features; precise and reliable.*

Pidduck *is with him. In the twelve years that have now elapsed since the first act, he has grown quite white and somewhat wizened. But he is as full of enthusiastic respect for* Blackshaw *as ever.*

Pidduck. And is this his desk?

Marshal. Yes.

Pidduck. And this his chair?

Marshal. It is.

PIDDUCK (*reverently*). Bless us! Bless us!—Mr. Marshal, in all your experience have you ever known anything like him?

MARSHAL. He's certainly the most prodigious success that ever was. Of course they're all peculiar, Ministers are! I've served under a number of them now. And I could tell you things—

PIDDUCK (*importantly*). I doubt if you could tell me anything about Mr. Blackshaw I don't know. I was his right hand man for more years than you've been under him months.

MARSHAL (*coldly*). Very interesting. Tell me, did you ever know him late for an appointment?

PIDDUCK. Never!

MARSHAL. Quite so. All other Ministers are always late, on principle. He's never late. Moreover he sees everyone. Very wearing! (*The clock strikes four.*) Heavens! Is he going to reform?

(Blackshaw *enters by the door left.*)

BLACKSHAW (*hanging up his hat*). Hello, old friend! I told them to show you straight in here in case you arrived first. How are you? (*To* Marshal.) Anything specially tragic, Marshal? (Marshal *silently shows him a paper.*) Oh! All right. Yes, yes. Telephone and say that I will ring him up myself before five o'clock. Thanks.

MARSHAL (*attentively*). Yes, sir.

(*He goes off by the door, centre.*)

BLACKSHAW (*shaking hands with* Pidduck). I'm delighted to see you. But look here—sit down, will you ?— (Pidduck *sits*.) First things first. I'm very pressed just now. Will you dine to-night? There'll only be Maria, Doris and me.

PIDDUCK. It wor't inconvenience you ?

BLACKSHAW. You will. Good. We'll talk *then*. I know you'll excuse Doris and me if we have an engagement later in the evening.

PIDDUCK. Oh, please!

BLACKSHAW. How's things—down there ? What's on your mind ? You've always got something on it.

PIDDUCK. Down at home we all want your advice about choosing a candidate for that bye-election that's coming—you know Swinnerton's health has given way, and he may resign at any moment.

BLACKSHAW (*nods. After a slight pause*). Quite simple. Stand yourself. Ideal !

PIDDUCK (*perturbed*). Oh! I couldn't think of it. Can you imagine *me* in London ?

BLACKSHAW. Why not ? You thought you couldn't run the business. And see how well you *have* run it.

PIDDUCK. I really must ask you—

BLACKSHAW. There, there! I was only trying to frighten you.

(*The telephone on his desk rings.*)

Excuse me. (*Into the telephone.*) Keep him in your room till I ring.

PIDDUCK. I'd better not stay now.

BLACKSHAW. Wait a moment. About those possible candidates. They're Wilby and Cotterill, eh ?

PIDDUCK. Yes.

BLACKSHAW. Between ourselves—strictly—take Cotterill. He'll be more amenable to party discipline than the other fellow. (*Very confidentially.*) And the Government needs all the reliable support it can get. I've just been lunching with the P.M.

PIDDUCK (*nodding wisely*). I see.

BLACKSHAW. That's the matter in a nutshell. Well, I'm not standing on ceremony with you. See you to-night, 8.15. (*He presses a button.*)

PIDDUCK. Success hasn't spoilt *you*.

(*They shake hands.*)

BLACKSHAW. Wait till I've *really* succeeded. See how stand-offish I shall be then!

PIDDUCK (*at the door left*). By the way, I was actually forgetting the cheque I received for you this morning.

BLACKSHAW. What cheque's that ? Oh, I know. Yes.

(Marshal *announces* " *Sir Howard Nathan.*")

(Nathan *enters by the door centre while* Pidduck *is producing the cheque.*)

NATHAN. Good afternoon.

BLACKSHAW. Afternoon, Nathan. Come in. Come in. This is Mr. Pidduck of Bursley, (*smiling*) who's been dealing with you on my behalf in British Unified Collieries shares. Sir Howard Nathan.

PIDDUCK (*coming back*). Pleased to meet you, Sir Howard.

NATHAN. Got that little cheque my stock-brokers passed on to you?

PIDDUCK. Curiously enough I was just going to endorse it and hand it over to Mr. Blackshaw.

NATHAN (*looking at* Blackshaw) I should'nt. I should'nt. No hurry! (*Directly to* Blackshaw.) Unless you want the money at once—

BLACKSHAW. Oh no, I don't want it particularly.

NATHAN. Then Mr. Pidduck might just as well keep it on deposit in his own name for the present. No harm in his paying the interest over to you.

BLACKSHAW. Just so. You see, Pidduck, this new Power Stations Bill of the P.M.'s has put me, just for the moment, in *rath*er a delicate position.

PIDDUCK. Power Stations Bill? (*Searching in his memory.*) I—

BLACKSHAW. You know. It's to erect power stations in all the principal coalfields for converting coal into electric power. Of course it ought to cheapen everything; but it will certainly increase

the value of coal—as against oil. And that happens to be the reason why those colliery shares have jumped so high these last few weeks.

NATHAN. *Too* high! They're sagging now. I got you top price for yours.

BLACKSHAW. Trust you! . . . . When I bought the shares I hadn't the faintest notion that the Prime Minister had any such legislation in mind. The thing's a pure and simple coincidence. But who believes coincidence? Nobody! You follow me?

PIDDUCK. I follow you.

BLACKSHAW. When the good faith of a Minister is concerned, the Opposition have an absolute rule against coincidences!

PIDDUCK. Leave it to me. (*He folds up the cheque.*)

BLACKSHAW. Let's have a look at it. (*Taking the cheque.*) Great Scott! Sixty-one thousand three hundred! And I only put in twenty thousand. (*Almost alarmed.*) It's staggering!

NATHAN. No! It's finance. You bought at par. The shares went up to over three.

BLACKSHAW. Anyway it's staggering to us professional men, isn't it, Pidduck? Here! (*He returns the cheque to* Pidduck.) Take the thing away. It might go off. Till to-night, then, eh?

PIDDUCK. 8.15. I'll see to this. (*Indicating cheque.*) Good-bye, Sir Howard.

NATHAN. Good-bye.

(Pidduck *leaves by the door, left.*)

(Nathan *bursts out laughing.*)

BLACKSHAW. What's the joke?

NATHAN. Your Pidduck is the joke. I suppose he really does believe in the coincidence? Or is he also a finished performer?

BLACKSHAW (*gravely; ready to take offence*). My dear fellow, what on earth do you mean? Do you suggest it was not a coincidence?

NATHAN. Well, I can only speak for myself.

BLACKSHAW. Do.

NATHAN. There are no coincidences in big finance. There is only early news.

BLACKSHAW. Early news?

NATHAN. Early news of facts. I set about to form my Company solely because I had some very private news about Holyoke's intention to introduce this Bill if he got into office again. I'm an outsider,—*I* knew. You were one of his intimates,—*you* didn't know! Nothing more to be said!

BLACKSHAW. I did *not* know.

NATHAN. You mean to say that at that interview we had in your office you'd heard *nothing* from Holyoke about his Bill—no tiny weeny bird whispering one useful little note into your ear?

BLACKSHAW (*fiercely*). Certainly not!

NATHAN. But you bought the shares under another name—not your own.

BLACKSHAW. At your suggestion! If I'd had the slightest suspicion, I wouldn't have touched the miserable thing.

NATHAN. All right! Then your ignorance has been pretty profitable to you, that's all. I always did believe in your star, Blackshaw. You're a very great success on the Front Bench. You've made a very great success of my paper. And now you've gone and pocketed over 40,000 quid—against your will. And not a soul will be any the wiser.

BLACKSHAW. It'll be a lesson to me.

NATHAN. I wouldn't mind a few lessons myself on those terms. As a rule people pay for lessons; you're receiving—handsomely.

BLACKSHAW. No! I'm paying. I'm paying in my peace of mind. I'm paying in my conscience —But why go on? I should be talking a language you don't understand.

NATHAN. I speak six languages.

BLACKSHAW. But you only understand one. The language that money talks.

(*The telephone bell rings.*)

BLACKSHAW (*into the telephone*). Oh! Is she? (*To* Nathan.) My daughter.

NATHAN. Don't let me keep her waiting. I only called to give you a hint about the cheque.

BLACKSHAW (*into the telephone*). Ask her to come in. (*To* Nathan.) Sure you've nothing else?

NATHAN (*shaking his head*). I'll just greet the —heiress.

(Doris *enters by the door, centre, in a pretty summer frock.*)

DORIS. Oh! Sir Howard! (*She looks at* Blackshaw.) I hope I'm not in the way?

BLACKSHAW. The usual hope. Do you know that the British Colonies comprise over ten million square miles and over a hundred million inhabitants, and I'm responsible for the whole caboodle? And you come bursting in on me like this! Good-bye, Nathan.

DORIS (*to* Nathan, *after a disrespectful gesture to her father*). Were you going, Sir Howard? We're so looking forward to to-night. I hear you have all sorts of wonderful surprises for us.

NATHAN. Oh, no! It's just a little party.

DORIS. Yes, we know your little parties at Coombe, my dear Sir Howard! Don't we, dad?

BLACKSHAW. They put Rome to shame.

NATHAN. Well, don't be late, will you? The show begins at ten-thirty. Supper at midnight.

DORIS. It all sounds too delicious!

NATHAN. Au revoir.

BLACKSHAW (*opening the door left*). This is the shortest route.

(Nathan *goes off by the door left.*)

BLACKSHAW (*his tone showing that he is preoccupied with what has gone before*). Now, woman! What's the meaning of this?

DORIS. I've just been rung up by a certain person who wants me to join his dinner-party at the Embassy to-night, and then to motor out with him to the Nathan revel afterwards . . . . Lord Plinlimmon.

BLACKSHAW. What did you tell him ?

DORIS. I told him I couldn't answer right off, and ran round here to see you.

BLACKSHAW. Why me ? Why not your mother ?

DORIS. Oh, dad! Do please let's be realistic She's the greatest darling ever born, mother is; but she wouldn't understand. By the way, she doesn't really mean to go with us to Coombe to-night.

BLACKSHAW (*acknowledging the last sentence with a gesture*). Very well, let's be realistic then. Plinlimmon's begun again ?

DORIS. Yes.

BLACKSHAW. It's not your fault, but you've made two men very discontented with life. You rather look down on Edgar Dart.

DORIS. I don't, father.

BLACKSHAW. Oh yes, you do, my dear. On the other hand you're rather dazzled by Plinlimmon, but you're afraid of him.

DORIS. Indeed I'm not.

BLACKSHAW. Am I being too realistic ?

DORIS. Go on.

BLACKSHAW. I'm not quite in favour of Plinlimmon. He's rich. He has a big position. And I'm glad to know that he's at last taken to work.

DORIS. Yes. He told me he'd joined a big firm of stock-brokers.

BLACKSHAW. Well, that's something. But he's too old for you. He's twice your age. Some marriages between the young and the middle-aged work well, but jolly few.

DORIS. He's not middle-aged!

BLACKSHAW. Perhaps not. But he's fifty.

DORIS. Then you vote against him.

BLACKSHAW. No—but I'll give you some advice my dear. Wait. Let things develop of themselves.

DORIS (*disappointed*). Then you think I oughtn't to go to his dinner?

(*The telephone bell rings.*)

BLACKSHAW (*into the telephone*). Yes? In the waiting-room? (*To* Doris.) He's here.

DORIS. Who?

BLACKSHAW. Plinlimmon. Wants to see me at once, urgently. (*Into the telephone.*) Marshal, just show him in; not through your room, through the hall.

DORIS. But what is it? I *thought* his voice was rather queer when he rang me up before.

BLACKSHAW. You'd better wait in Marshal's room. (*Indicating door C.*) We'll finish our conference afterwards. Hurry, hurry, my frightened fawn!

(Doris *goes off by the centre door.*)

(Marshal *shows in* Plinlimmon *by the door, left.*)

PLINLIMMON (*constrained, but with firmness and self-control*). Good-afternoon, Blackshaw.

BLACKSHAW. How d'you do? Sit down, will you?

PLINLIMMON (*as he sits, looking round to see if the door is closed*). Blackshaw, my business is very strange and very urgent. Listen to me.

BLACKSHAW. I'm quite at your service.

PLINLIMMON. I've scarcely seen you since you walked over my head into the Cabinet. But I don't want you to think I've got any feeling against you about that. I haven't. Not the least.

BLACKSHAW. I shouldn't have expected anything else of you.

PLINLIMMON. I'm here to see you about your daughter.

BLACKSHAW. Oh!

PLINLIMMON. Yes. I want to marry her. I've wanted to marry her since the day I first met her, over a year ago.

BLACKSHAW. Have you said anything to her?

PLINLIMMON. No.

BLACKSHAW. Rather strange course you're adopting, isn't it—in these days ?

PLINLIMMON. It is. But the circumstances are strange—very strange.

BLACKSHAW. Are they ? How ?

PLINLIMMON. I'm coming to that directly. But first— (*After a moment's hesitation.*) Would you object to me as a prospective son-in-law ? Please be frank. It will be much better, believe me—

BLACKSHAW. Well are you quite young enough for her ? You must be as old as I am.

PLINLIMMON. But I could make your daughter happy ? I'm not without advantages. I can offer her a very considerable position in the world. And what's quite as important, I'm absolutely devoted to her.

BLACKSHAW. I won't dispute either the position or the devotion.

PLINLIMMON. But there's something else ?

BLACKSHAW. I do not think you would make Doris happy—for long.

PLINLIMMON. But why don't you ?

BLACKSHAW. I've answered enough questions. I should prefer not to say any more. If you succeed with Doris, you'll succeed with me. Isn't that sufficient ?

PLINLIMMON. Will you allow me—in the strictest confidence of course—to tell one of my most intimate friends that I've approached you and you formally approve ?

BLACKSHAW. Not before you have Doris's consent. It wouldn't be right.

PLINLIMMON (*in a new tone*). Well, I'm sorry for all of us. "Sorry" do I say? The word is inadequate.

BLACKSHAW. What do you mean?

PLINLIMMON. I'll tell you. 20,000 shares in the British Unified Collieries were bought a fortnight ago by my firm for a client. When the transfer came along, my senior partner happened to see that the address of the seller was Bursley in the Five Towns. He's made enquiries. He's found out that Ezra Pidduck, the seller, used to be your managing clerk down there. Also that a year ago, when Mr. Pidduck was known to be hard up, Mr. Pidduck paid £20,000 in cash for these same shares.

BLACKSHAW. And what then?

PLINLIMMON. What then? My partner has convinced himself that this Ezra Pidduck has been only a cover for yourself, and that you've been exploiting confidential information obtained by you from Holyoke for your own private profit.

BLACKSHAW. And supposing I give you my assurance that your partner's suspicions are utterly unfounded?

PLINLIMMON. They may be. I don't say they aren't. But my partner is determined to expose the facts. He could easily have it done in the House. But you know he also has a very large

share in the *Evening Despatch*. Something may appear in the Final of the *Despatch* to-night.

BLACKSHAW (*calmly*). I see. But may I ask what all this has to do with my daughter?

PLINLIMMON. I urged him to leave the thing alone. I implored him. At last I got him to say that if I had your support as a suitor, he'd consent to hold his hand.

BLACKSHAW. But you haven't got my support.

PLINLIMMON. No. I haven't got your support . . . And my partner is persuaded that he can bring about the fall of the statesman whom he detests more than any other in public life to-day.

BLACKSHAW. Ha! Does he?

PLINLIMMON. Your success frightens him. He sees you Prime Minister in a few years. And there's nothing he dreads so much as that.

BLACKSHAW. You've been straightforward.

PLINLIMMON. I've tried to be.

BLACKSHAW. I'm grateful to you, and I'd like to show you that I am grateful. Besides, I want to make quite sure I'm thinking of Doris's happiness first and foremost. (*He goes to the door, centre, opens it and calls.*) Doris! Come in here, will you?

PLINLIMMON (*agitated*). Is she here?

(Doris *re-enters by the centre door.*)

PLINLIMMON. Miss Blackshaw, I really hadn't the slightest idea—

(*They shake hands awkwardly.*)

BLACKSHAW (*cheerfully*). Doris, my dear, Lord Plinlimmon has done an extraordinary thing,—and it's a very honest thing; but it rather forces me to do another extraordinary thing. Lord Plinlimmon wants to know—

PLINLIMMON. Please, please, Blackshaw!

BLACKSHAW. My dear fellow, allow me to speak. It's not your daughter I'm dealing with. It's mine. (*Resuming.*) Lord Plinlimmon wants to know whether I will give my permission to his—well, as we used to call it in the Five Towns —his paying his addresses to you. Shall I, or shan't I?

DORIS. Well, of all the amazing questions—!

BLACKSHAW. Yes, yes, I admit that. But shall I, or shan't I?

(*A pause.*)

DORIS (*between timidity and archness, between humour and tenderness*). I don't see any powerful reason why you shouldn't, Dad.

PLINLIMMON (*to* Doris, *with a sigh of intense relief*). How splendidly you face it!

DORIS (*gently*). Do I? Still I do think it's rather odd. And here I've been flattering myself all these years that nothing could startle me!

BLACKSHAW (*in an outburst, after a few instants of mute but violent excitement*). "Odd!" . . . "*Odd!*" It's devilish. My girl, my girl, there's every reason why I shouldn't consent. And yet for a moment I was ready to. Lord Plinlimmon has brought me the news that there's a damnable scheme on foot to ruin my career,—ruin it for

ever! He can save me if only he marries you. I said I would never interfere in your private affairs, my girl. But by God I will! I will! You shan't marry him! He wouldn't make you happy. And if I am to choose between your happiness and my career, I choose your happiness.

DORIS. Father!

(*She goes to him and puts her hand trustfully and affectionately on his shoulder.*)

(Plinlimmon *realises he has lost* Doris, *turns quickly and goes off by the door, left.*)

BLACKSHAW. But I don't have to choose! (*In a matter of fact tone, moving away from* Doris.) Telephone to Dart for me, will you? Ask him to come here at once. I may be in danger, but (*confidently*) I've a sort of an idea I shall know how to defend myself. (Doris *is about to come to him again—full of emotion; he discourages her with a gesture.*) Telephone, will you? There's a good girl!

(*He turns to the big globe standing left and gives it a vigorous twirl.*)

CURTAIN.

Scene II

The Gardens of Nathan's House at Coombe.

The Gardens are large and shadowy—full of fine old trees. In the background a distant view of hills. In the middle distance, a small lake with an island. On the island, a summer house—evidently built in the eighteenth century in imitation of a ruined Roman temple. It is reached by a small stone bridge. On the left, terrace steps apparently lead to the house, which is imagined to be some distance away. Close to the proscenium, left and right, small paths. A Roman marble bench right. It is about eleven o'clock on a moonlit night in June. Chinese lanterns are hung here and there in the trees and between the columns of the temple. Three Italian singers, are standing at the top of the temple steps.

Many guests are grouped about. Georgie, *in a gorgeous gown stands with some friends in the centre.* Nathan *is with another group left.*

Dancers appear from the temple and perform a short fantastic ballet. As they finish there is much applause from the guests, and one or two murmurs of "Encore."

Nathan (*with a rather hard, compelling smile, as if determined that his party shall succeed according to a prearranged, elaborate, and perfect plan*). No

encores, please! Supper's waiting on the covered terrace. (*Cajolingly.*) And it's the only terrace in England that's got central heating! (*To his group.*) Do set a good example and say how hungry you are. I'm coming in one moment. (*The guests go off left.* Nathan *moves towards* Georgie.) Georgie!

GEORGIE (*bowing to her friends and leaving them*). Our mighty host is getting anxious. (*Her friends follow the other guests, left. To* Nathan.) And now?

NATHAN (*in an ordinary voice*). We'll never get that supper going as long as these Italian devils keep singing.

GEORGIE. Well then, start a Bengal light up there on the Terrace. The public will leave any performance on earth to run after a red glow.

NATHAN. You're right. (*To an attendant who has heard.*) Run and see to it. (*To* Georgie.) I tell you what it is—it is this Blackshaw scandal that looks like messing up my party. But I'm not going to have my party messed up.

GEORGIE. Of course not. When I think what it's costing you in lobster salad alone—

NATHAN. Damn what it's costing me. It's the result that matters. And the result will be a disaster if the people don't stop talking about those scareheads in the *Evening Despatch*. Just to-night! What a cursed nuisance! Has the Prime Minister come yet?

GEORGIE. No. But when he does he's got to fall for me. Poor Blackshaw's here.

NATHAN. Yes, he's somewhere in the plantation talking to Doris. I must catch him alone.

GEORGIE. It wanted some nerve to come at all.

NATHAN. He's got to brazen it out you see. (*Indicating the musicians.*) Now do go and shift those dagoes.

GEORGIE. But I can't talk Italian.

NATHAN. Try Cockney. They look much too Italian to be anything but Shoreditch.

GEORGIE. No! You see to them. I'll handle the guests! The aristocracy loves to be bullied by artistes. It makes them feel they're seeing life! Just you watch me! (*To an elderly stout man.*) Lord Harrogate, you'd better hurry, or the caviar soufflé 'll be getting cold. (*To an old lady.*) It's rather damp for the legs here by this lake, don't you think? I wouldn't have your rheumatism worse for worlds! (*To a young man.*) Mr. Erskine! That astounding Miss Carbury's been asking after you! She's up there on the terrace. (*The young man hurries off.*) (*To* Nathan.) You see how easy it is! You've only got to appeal to their higher natures.

NATHAN. Georgie, you're a marvel.

GEORGIE. Yes, I am. And meantime the dagoes are still hard at it. I'll deal with them. (*She turns and crosses the bridge to the island where the singers are.*) (*Imitating Italian.*) Here, I say! Oddenino, Frascati, Luigi! Batti. Batti. Dove Sono! A chè ora il pasto! Spaghetti! Vermicelli!

(*The guests go up the Terrace steps and disappear.* Dart *enters rapidly by the path down left.*)

NATHAN. Hello! Just come? Paper all snug?

DART. Yes, Sir Howard. Mr. Blackshaw here?

NATHAN (*curtly*). Somewhere.

(*He follows the guests up the Terrace steps.*)

(Dart *looks about.*)

(Georgie *has now spoken to the musicians, who disappear to the left, playing and singing, the music dying away slowly. She looks after them for a moment, then apparently seeing some friends at the back to the right, comes down the Temple steps and goes off in that direction.*)

(Doris *enters by the path down right, with two young girls.*)

DORIS (*lightly*). Lo! Edgar! How forlorn he looks, doesn't he? (*The girls titter.*) You know Miss Mountaspen and Miss Lacey.

DART. Oh yes! (*Smiles and bows are interchanged.*) Is your father about?

DORIS. Very much. (*More tittering.*) We've just left him with General Lacey. (*She indicates the path right.*)

DART. I want to speak to him.

DORIS. How wise of you! But I say, Edgar! Are you under the impression that you're at a midnight funeral?

(*A red glow appears high up at the back left, as though coming from the Terrace.*)

First Girl. Oh, look! The fireworks!

Second Girl. Do let's go. Come on, Doris.

Doris. One second.

(*The two young girls hurry up the Terrace steps.*)

Doris (*to* Dart, *in a low, anxious voice*). You don't seem to know how to hide your feelings. The least you can do is to *pretend* to be gay.

Dart. Have you *seen* the stuff in the *Despatch* to-night?

Doris. Of course I've seen it . . . Look here, do you mean to say you think father's guilty?

Dart (*savagely*). Look here, don't you insult me.

Doris (*deeply pleased by his reply*). Oh, that's all right, then. Pretty odious, wasn't it?

Dart. I can tell you if *I'd* been on the paper it wouldn't have appeared. I'd have burnt down the blasted building before I'd have let it appear.

Doris (*profoundly touched, but hiding her feelings*). I'm sure you would.

(Georgie *re-enters from the back right, coming round the Temple. She is now accompanied by old* General Lacey.)

(Dart *moves away from* Doris.)

Georgie. Well, Mr. Dart.

Dart (*trying to be gay*). How are the rehearsals getting along, Miss Dream?

GEORGIE. Awful! Something chronic. You're coming to the first night?

DART. Am I coming! I shall do the criticism myself. So look out.

GEORGIE. I shall. I never object to criticisms. We learn so much from them.

DART. *Do* you?

GEORGIE. Yes. And you critics are ever so much nicer than authors.

DART. Oh?

GEORGIE. Rather. I only have to *read* your lines. I have to speak the authors'! Good God!

DORIS (*pointing off to the right; to* Dart). Here's Dad now!

GEORGIE. Come along, Doris. General Lacey wants to take you in to supper. He's like all of us, dying of thirst—I mean hunger.

(*She puts her arm round* Doris's *waist and goes off with her and the* General *up the Terrace steps.*)

(*All the guests, except* Dart, *have now left the scene.*)

(Blackshaw *enters from the back right.*)

BLACKSHAW (*to* Dart). Got the proof? Give it me. (Dart *hands him a newspaper slip proof*, Blackshaw *moves aside to read it by the light of a lantern. As he reads.*) You've not gone to press?

DART. Not with the late London edition. I told 'em to hold it till I 'phone.

BLACKSHAW. Pretty effective article that, I think.

DART. First-rate, sir.

BLACKSHAW. Clear ?

DART. Quite.

BLACKSHAW. And dignified, I think ?

DART. Perfectly. Can I go now and 'phone it's O.K. ?

BLACKSHAW. I fancy I'd better show it to Nathan first. His paper, after all! He doesn't know about it.

DART. Well, sir, there's no time to lose. Shall I go and find him for you and send him here ?

BLACKSHAW. Do.

DART (*moving away to the left*). By the way, sir, Mrs. Opletree's been asking if you were here.

BLACKSHAW. Mrs. Opletree's in Paris.

DART. Her car drove up at the same time as my taxi. Oh! (*Pointing to the terrace steps.*) Isn't that she, coming down ?

BLACKSHAW (*controlling himself*). Run along and get Nathan.

DART. Yes, sir.

(*He hurries off by the little path down left.*)

(Oriana *appears on the Terrace steps dressed in a wonderful gown.*)

(Blackshaw *goes to meet her.*)

BLACKSHAW (*seizing her hand ; anxiously*). Has anything happened, my angel ?

ORIANA. Nothing but good! Let me have a look at you! (*She leads him down to a lantern.*)

You seem very tired. As soon as my back's turned you start over-working again.

BLACKSHAW. I'm quite all right. And you?

ORIANA (*nods*). Drop my hand—here. (*Looking about.*)

(*The Italians are heard to sing very faintly.*)

BLACKSHAW. I didn't expect you back for days. How did you come?

ORIANA. Flew.

BLACKSHAW. I don't like it.

ORIANA (*touched*). Foolish one! If there hadn't been a lot of delay at Croydon I should have got here sooner. I found Nathan's invitation, swallowed something, made myself alluring, drove over, and here I am. I thought I'd surprise you.

BLACKSHAW. Well, it's the best thing that's happened to me since you left.

ORIANA. I got all my frocks finished this morning. Do you like this one? (*Somewhat displaying herself.*) Does it suit me?

BLACKSHAW. It's one of heaven's miracles.

ORIANA. I'm glad you really like it. (*Eagerly.*) Oh, Simon, everything's arranged! Poor old Maurice met me over in Paris and we agreed definitely to go our own ways. It was all quite friendly, and I was so relieved. He went off yesterday morning to Bordeaux to join the yacht. He was quite cheerful. (*With a sigh of satisfaction.*) So I'm free now!

BLACKSHAW. Free?

ORIANA. Not legally of course, I know. But here—in my conscience. Oh! My dear boy, how I will work for you now! And we'll be more discreet than ever! How heavenly to have a frightful, lovely secret like ours! And Simon —do you know?—All the political people in Paris talk about you—far more even than about Holyoke. They say you're bound to be Prime Minister. I was perfectly thrilled! And I had all I could do to hide it.

(*The music ceases.*)

BLACKSHAW. Do you mean the English Colony?

ORIANA. No. The French themselves. The Quai d'Orsay people.

BLACKSHAW. Ah! Well, speaking for myself, I'm always afraid of the little cloud on the horizon.

ORIANA. What little cloud?

BLACKSHAW. No bigger than a man's hand. Only it's much bigger, very much bigger.

ORIANA (*alarmed*). Have they been talking about us?

BLACKSHAW. No, no. Nothing whatever to do with you.

ORIANA. Tell me, Simon.

(Nathan *and* Dart *re-enter quickly by the little path down left. A few seconds later* Georgie *re-appears on the Terrace steps. She has evidently followed* Nathan. *She stands in the background listening attentively.*)

NATHAN (*rather grimly, but politely*). Hard luck on my party. I'd just got the supper going. (*Smoothly to Blackshaw.*) What is it ?

BLACKSHAW (*with equal smoothness*). I've been looking for you. I'm putting *this* in the paper to-night. I thought you might like to run through it first.

(*He hands* Nathan *the proof of the article, which* Nathan *takes, moving away to a lantern in order to read it.*)

ORIANA (*aside to Blackshaw*). What is it all about ?

BLACKSHAW. In two words I'm accused of using Government secrets to make a little bit for myself.

ORIANA. A little bit of what ?

BLACKSHAW. Money. Forty thousand. There's what they call an " exposure " in the *Evening Despatch* to-night.

ORIANA (*indignant*). I wonder what vile trick they'll try next!

(*She turns impatiently and goes up to* Georgie *with an appealing gesture, then stands with her watching the others.*)

NATHAN (*having read the article*). Good idea this of yours to give all the money to the Hospital Fund. Costly; but excellent.

BLACKSHAW. It seemed to me the only thing to do.

NATHAN (*approaching*). Very brilliant article. Quite your best vein.

BLACKSHAW. Well, believe me, I felt like writing it.

DART (*eagerly*). Then shall I run and 'phone it O.K. ?

NATHAN. You will not. (*To* Blackshaw, *very judicial, smooth and courteous*). It can't appear in the *Messenger*—at least not unless it appears in all the other London dailies as well.

DART (*interposing quickly*). No time to get it into any paper except our own to-night, sir.

BLACKSHAW (*to* Nathan). But why can't it appear ? Don't you realise the immense importance of me replying immediately—getting the start of all the rest of the pack. These rumours have to be killed at once, or they're apt to get out of hand.

NATHAN. I fully realise that. But I have to think of my paper. My paper is a great property.

BLACKSHAW. I made it a great property.

NATHAN (*calmly, detached*). I agree. But that's beside the point.

BLACKSHAW. Moreover, you gave me the absolute control of your paper.

NATHAN. Politically, yes. But this isn't politics. It's a purely private scandal.

BLACKSHAW. Everything I did, I did with your approval; in fact at your suggestion.

NATHAN. I'm not disputing that for a moment, my dear Blackshaw. I'll go further and admit, that I myself did all that you did, and more than you did. But I don't mind who knows what

I did. Public knowledge of it can't possibly harm me. I'm a financier. You're a statesman. And public knowledge of what you did may prove to be exceedingly dangerous.

BLACKSHAW. Yes, but if I explain—

NATHAN. How can you explain? You have directed the politics of my paper—true enough. But that fact has never yet been stated publicly. You are now under a cloud, and if your article appears in my paper exclusively, my paper at once proclaims its intimate connection with you. And I cannot allow my paper to proclaim its intimate connection with a man under a cloud. You see the argument?

BLACKSHAW (*disdainfully*). What I see is that I made a fatal mistake in ever associating myself with you.

NATHAN. Indeed?

BLACKSHAW. Yes. Your advantage over me was too great. I'm handicapped with what they call a code of honour. You are not.

NATHAN. An insult is no answer to an argument.

GEORGIE. But look here, Howdy—

NATHAN. Georgie, would you mind keeping out of this!

GEORGIE. No, I won't keep out of it. What I say is—argument be blowed. As if it was a thing to argue over! (*Sweetly again.*) I was only going to ask you to give way to Mr. Blackshaw if he's in a hole.

NATHAN. No.

GEORGIE. No?

NATHAN. No! It would be against all my principles.

GEORGIE (*letting herself go*). Your principles be hanged, Howdy, every damn one of 'em! Who in hell do you think you're talking to? Am I in the back row of the chorus, or am I the biggest draw in London? When I ask a favour I'm used to getting it. And if you don't like the look of my face, I'll take it away.

NATHAN (*startled*). My dear Georgie! Please don't be absurd.

GEORGIE. Absurd indeed! There's as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it. Get that into your head.

NATHAN. Georgie!

GEORGIE. I mean it!

NATHAN (*to* Dart *after a moment's hesitation*). Very well. You can O.K. it!

DART. Where's the 'phone?

GEORGIE (*recovering her composure*). I'll show you. (*To the group.*) Sorry I let the milk boil over. That's all right, Howdy. (*To* Blackshaw.) And don't you imagine, Mr. Blackshaw, I'm falling for your lovely eyes, because I've taken your part. I'm only protecting Nathan against himself. When it comes to the point the poor dear's got no more sense than any other of you self-satisfied male creatures. Come, Mr. Dart.

(Georgie *and* Dart *hurry off by the little path, left.*)

NATHAN (*to* Blackshaw). I do it to oblige you.

BLACKSHAW (*witheringly*). Or to oblige Georgie Dream ?

NATHAN (*unruffled*). But I think you will be well-advised to resign from the paper.

BLACKSHAW. This moment!

NATHAN. Thanks! . . . . Here. (*Handing* Blackshaw *the proof.*) You may like to keep this.

BLACKSHAW (*taking it*). Thanks. (*He starts crumpling it up.* Oriana *quickly takes it from him, smoothes it out and glances at it.*) And as this is probably the last time we shall speak to each other for some considerable period—(*he stops*)

NATHAN. Yes ?

BLACKSHAW. I'll just tell you what I think of you—

NATHAN (*advancing*). Well !—Go on !—Go on!—

BLACKSHAW. It's men like you that befoul the wonderful race you belong to and make us misjudge it.

NATHAN. You leave my race alone, will you ? —Who are you to judge my race ?—Go to hell!

BLACKSHAW (*taking him by the collar*). You miserable swine!

ORIANA (*intervening*). Simon! For heaven's sake! The Prime Minister!

BLACKSHAW (*releasing* Nathan). Puh!

(Holyoke *comes down the Terrace steps.*)

(Nathan *moves to meet him.*)

HOLYOKE. My dear Sir Howard! (*He shakes hands.*) This place is fairyland, (*indicating the Temple*) and with Hellenistic remains!

NATHAN. I'm very flattered by your presence Mr. Holyoke. Let me take you to the supper.

HOLYOKE. I'll just speak to Mr. Blackshaw first. (Nathan *hesitates.*) Alone.

NATHAN. Certainly.

(*He goes off by the Terrace steps.*)

HOLYOKE. Ah! Mrs. Opletree. How resplendent! (*Shaking hands.*) How resplendent! . . . . My dear Blackshaw. A word in private before we sup. (*He looks at* Oriana.)

ORIANA. No, Mr. Holyoke (*engagingly*). You can dismiss your host. But not me. I'm not going. I have a responsibility in this affair.

HOLYOKE. What affair ?

ORIANA. *This* affair. It was after a little talk with my very humble self that you decided to ask our friend to join the Cabinet.

BLACKSHAW (*to* Oriana). You might give Mr. Holyoke that proof.

(Oriana *does so.*)

HOLYOKE. Is this the *Messenger's* reply to the *Evening Despatch ?* How convenient it is to have one's own newspaper! One says just what one pleases. A home from home . . . But you haven't *signed* this article, have you, my dear friend ?

BLACKSHAW. Naturally I've signed it.

HOLYOKE. It would have been more regular to consult me first.

BLACKSHAW. I spent the latter part of the afternoon and a good bit of the evening in trying to find you—without success.

HOLYOKE (*as he reads*). One has one's private life, dear friend. One has one's private life. One cannot remain for ever at the end of a telephone wire on the chance of a great crisis supervening. I admit that occasionally I go out and leave not a trace behind.

BLACKSHAW. I'm sorry.

HOLYOKE. The proper place for this manifesto of yours was the House. (*Still reading.*) So you did buy the shares in a name not your own ?

BLACKSHAW. Yes. It's often done.

HOLYOKE. And your reason ?

(*He ceases reading and looks up.*)

BLACKSHAW. I give it there. My native place is the centre of an important coal-mining district, and I didn't want to run any risk of misinterpretation—

HOLYOKE (*looking again at the article*). Yes, yes. I see. Well, my dear friend, upon my soul I don't know what I shall do without you. You were by far the ablest man in my—er—troupe of performers.

BLACKSHAW. You think I ought to resign! (*With vivacity.*) Yet I'm absolutely innocent. *You* know that I'd never heard of your projected Bill.

Holyoke. Agreed. I'm sure you are entirely innocent of the charge brought against you, but you're guilty—pardon a word so crude—you're guilty of something much more serious; you're guilty of being found out. I'm sorry for you. But I'm sorrier for myself. I feel quite broken.

Blackshaw. And you want my resignation?

Holyoke. I shall have no alternative but to accept it, by first post to-morrow morning. As to the propriety of resigning your seat in the House, I express no opinion, my dear friend.

Blackshaw. Thank you.

Oriana. I can see it's all the fault of this man Nathan.

Holyoke. Ah, dear lady. If we traffic with the Nathans of this world—!

Oriana. Yet you're his guest to-night.

Holyoke. Only as a student of human nature. We students of human nature must shrink before nothing.

Oriana. You're even going to sup with him.

Holyoke. I am. But I always carry a long spoon.

(*He wanders off up the Terrace steps.*)

Blackshaw (*sitting down on the stone bench, grimly*). Well, anyhow, I know where I am. I've lost everything! Everything! Everything!

Oriana (*behind the bench*). Don't dare to say it! (*Leaning over it impulsively and suddenly kissing him; then withdrawing again*) Ah! My

dearest, you don't yet understand what the love of a woman like me is. *I* didn't understand until a moment ago. The realisation of what it is makes me—oh, so happy, even now! I said I would work for you. But I will work for you more marvellously and more secretly than any woman ever worked for any man. And nobody will know except you. And I shall want no praise except your glance, and no reward except your success.

BLACKSHAW. What can I answer?

ORIANA. Don't answer. Fight!

(*A slight pause.*)

BLACKSHAW (*pointing left*). Someone!

(Oriana *moves away.*)

(Dart *enters hurriedly by the little path, left.*)

DART. I've got through. It's all right. The paper's going to press. (*He makes a sign to* Blackshaw, *who rises and approaches him, mystified.*) (*In a low voice.*) While I was on the 'phone I took a message for Mrs. Opletree. Her husband was drowned last night. Dinghy capsized returning to his yacht. The skipper has cabled from Bordeaux.

BLACKSHAW (*quickly*). Any other details?

DART. None.

BLACKSHAW. Leave me to tell her.

(Dart *goes off again by the path left.*)

ORIANA. What's all this mystery?

BLACKSHAW. No mystery. My dear one, you must prepare yourself for a great shock.

ORIANA. What on earth do you mean ?

BLACKSHAW. A very great shock—Your husband was drowned last night at Bordeaux. Dinghy upset!

ORIANA. How do you know ?

BLACKSHAW. Dart . . . Telephone . . . Cable from France.

ORIANA (*after holding her face in her hands*). Simon, you're glad. You can't keep the happiness out of your voice.

BLACKSHAW (*shaking his head*). I realise the shock it must be, and I feel for you, my dear one.

ORIANA. Drowned, did you say ? Drowned ? My poor Maurice ?

BLACKSHAW. Yes.

ORIANA. But he was a fine swimmer. I tell you he was a magnificent swimmer.

BLACKSHAW. Swept away by the tide, perhaps, or perhaps trying to save someone else.

ORIANA. Ah, yes! That was it. That must have been it. Saving someone else. (*After a pause, collectedly.*) Simon, I killed him.

BLACKSHAW (*protesting*). My poor girl!

ORIANA (*still collectedly*). I killed him, and I killed his love for me. I dragged him to London, not for his sake but for mine. He loathed London. He loathed politics. But I made him go on and

on and on. He had enough of it at last. He went . . . to be drowned. And I did it.

BLACKSHAW. You never would have done it but for me. I made you come to London. If anyone's to blame, I am.

ORIANA. We're both to blame. That's the truth of it. We have done an awful sin together, you and I, and now we are both punished.

BLACKSHAW. Our miserable ambition . . .

ORIANA. And look where our ambition's landed us! Do you remember the time when you said everything would be dust and ashes without our love?—Now everything *is* dust and ashes—and our love, too.

BLACKSHAW. No. Not our love, Oriana.

ORIANA. Yes, our love. When we were on the crest of the wave, what we did seemed beautiful. But to go on would be sordid.

BLACKSHAW (*approaching her*). Dear angel—

ORIANA. No, Simon. He's dead!—Could we ever kiss again with—that—(*indicating a dead body*) lying between us? I'm going now.

BLACKSHAW. When shall I see you?

ORIANA. I don't know. Perhaps never.

BLACKSHAW. Never?

ORIANA. Somehow this dreadful thing has opened my eyes. See what my love for you has done to Maurice. If we went on, what might it not do to your wife—and your daughter? It's unthinkable.

BLACKSHAW. But I can't let you go like this!

ORIANA. You must—

BLACKSHAW. But you'll want help.

ORIANA. Not from you, Simon. Not from you. Good-bye.

BLACKSHAW. No!—No!

ORIANA (*firmly and compassionately*). To-morrow I shall go away and London won't see me any more—ever. Good-bye. Think of your wife and daughter.

BLACKSHAW. Oriana!

ORIANA. Please Simon! Please! Things were too wonderful. They're over . . . . Good-bye!

(*She goes up the Terrace steps, firmly.*)

(Blackshaw *moves vaguely as if dazed, then finally sits on a broken column at the foot of the Temple.*)

(*The Italian musicians are distantly heard.*)

BLACKSHAW (*to himself*). Music . . . . And ruin . . . .

(Doris *enters by the little path, left. She sees her father and hurries to his side.*)

DORIS. Dad! (*She sits close to him.*) Is it true you've resigned? (*He nods. She puts her arm round his neck.*) But I'm here.

CURTAIN.

Scene III

The Blackshaw's *Drawing Room in Eaton Place.*

At the back centre, a fireplace.

On the wall right, in the centre, a door leading to the hall. On the wall left, a large window.

The room is pleasantly furnished, but with regard more to comfort than to any particular style. There is a settee to the right of the fireplace; a large writing-table with a lamp stands in front of the window left. Various easy chairs and tables. A portrait of Blackshaw *over the mantel-piece. Four months have passed. It is about ten o'clock on an October evening.*

The crimson window curtains are all drawn; the room is lighted by several lamps. A fire is burning in the grate.

Blackshaw, *in an old smoking-jacket, is busily working at the writing table.* Mrs. Blackshaw, *in a simple dark dinner gown is seated on the settee by the fire playing patience.*

Mrs. Blackshaw. Simon, it's after ten.

Blackshaw. I know.

Mrs. Blackshaw. You're working too long.

Blackshaw. I know that too.

Mrs. Blackshaw. It's worse than politics.

BLACKSHAW (*raising his head positively*). It is!

(*He sighs. An electric bell rings very faintly.*)

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Anyway, it tires you more. (*Listening.*) Who's calling at this time of night?

BLACKSHAW. Someone who's come to the wrong house, of course.

(*The Parlour-maid, a middle-aged woman, enters by the hall door.*)

PARLOUR-MAID. Mr. Edgar Dart.

(Dart *comes into the room.*)

DART. Good evening.

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*not moving*). Oh! It's only Edgar.

BLACKSHAW (*teasing*). Mother! Is that the way to welcome a guest—" It's only—"?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Edgar understands.

DART. When you say " only " it's a compliment isn't it? (*To* Blackshaw.) In fact, sir, Mrs. Blackshaw and I may be said to be intimates.

BLACKSHAW. And how do you manage to be so far away from Fleet Street at ten o'clock of a night, my boy?

DART (*vaguely*). Took an evening off. Felt sort of restless.

BLACKSHAW (*doubtful*). Oh!

(*With a bored air he starts putting his papers together.*)

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*to* Dart). It won't come out. (*Pointing to a card.*) You see there!

DART. Yes. Nasty.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Never mind. I shall cheat.

BLACKSHAW (*to* Dart). And why are you restless?

DART. I expect I'm getting a bit tired of journalism. It's a dirty business, sir.

BLACKSHAW. Do you know any business that isn't dirty? I'm blessed if I do. Look at the law. Look at patience, where you have to cheat even yourself in order to succeed. There's only one trade that's absolutely honest.

DART. And what is that, sir?

BLACKSHAW (*rising and closing his despatch case*). The hangman's. Yes, I should put hanging first, for cleanliness—and politics last.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Now please don't begin on politics again, Simon.

BLACKSHAW. Why shouldn't I? I'm the impartial spectator. I remember an average decent sinner of the name of Blackshaw, who started in with a fine assorted stock of democratic ideals and good intentions. And before he knew what he was doing he'd developed into the champion of low taxes for the rich, and was trying to get a bit of unearned increment for himself by a speculation that he didn't care to own. Couldn't help it, somehow. Evil communications. The fellow died ignominiously.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Simon! Will you stop?

BLACKSHAW (*more lightly*). When I went back to my business I thought I should have dreadful

trouble. Not a bit. Many of my clients actually congratulated me on having cleared out of Whitehall and gone back to something relatively honest. The others stuck to me because I'm such a thundering good lawyer. To-day my practice—after only four months—is larger than ever it was.

Mrs. Blackshaw. Yes, and I wish it wasn't .... The way you work—before you go to the office in the morning, at the office, and after you come home at night!

Blackshaw (*with exaggerated emphasis, as if trying to convince himself*). Never mind! I wouldn't go back to politics for any reward that anybody could conceivably offer me. The humiliations, the disappointments, the subterfuges, the ingratitude, the disgusting compromises, the chicane, the damned rascalities—

Mrs. Blackshaw. Simon!

Blackshaw (*with a short burst of laughter*). All right, my lass! But, Dart, don't you ever touch politics. I know what I'm talking about.

(Doris *comes into the room.*)

Doris (*casually to* Dart). Hello? You've turned idle too, have you?

Dart (*firmly*). Yes. Good evening.

Doris. Oh, good evening, Mr. Dart. (*Holding up a small green packet and an envelope.*) The last delivery. I suppose I may as well open them, dad. In the dear dead days beyond recall, we used to have fifty letters every evening. Now—a bill and some press-cuttings. (*Reading.*) "The

Trinidad Watchman," " The Right Honourable Simon Blackshaw will ever be remembered for his munificent gift of forty thousand pounds to the London Hospitals." And so on. *And* so on.

BLACKSHAW (*laughing*). Politics! In a nutshell! (*Suddenly he ceases laughing; his face becomes grim.*)

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*quickly*). But it *was* munificent. And what is the other cutting, my pet?

DORIS (*reading*). " We have reason to believe that Mr. Simon Blackshaw is to be invited to stand for Bursley, his native town, at the by-election caused by the death of the late member, Sir Arthur Swinnerton."

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Father! What's this? You never said anything to me.

(Blackshaw *remains silent.*)

DORIS (*looking at* Dart). I suppose I needn't tell *you* what paper it's from? (Dart *is silent.*) (*To her parents.*) " The Daily Messenger," if you please. And look at the size of the head-line?

BLACKSHAW (*explosively*). Where did you get that from, Dart?

DART (*with false casualness*). Must have come into the office, sir. Hadn't you seen it?

BLACKSHAW. No! I had not.

DORIS. We don't take the *Messenger* now.

MRS. BLACKSHAW. We should like to for your sake, Edgar.

DORIS. No, we shouldn't, mother.

(*The bell rings again very faintly.*)

Mrs. Blackshaw (*listening*). Now who is it this time?

Dart. If it's a caller, it's probably Ezra Pidduck from Bursley. He telephoned me he should come to-night. I may as well tell you I got the news about the by-election direct from him.

Doris. Then why didn't you say so at first?

(*The Parlour-maid enters.*)

Parlour-maid. Mr. Ezra Pidduck has called, madam. Shall I show him in?

Blackshaw (*to* Mrs. Blackshaw). Wait!

Mrs. Blackshaw (*to* Parlour-maid). Bring Mr. Pidduck in, please. (*The* Parlour-maid *goes off again.*) I can't wait, Simon. I want to see him.

Doris. You'd better see him now, Dad, and have it out once and for all.

(*The* Parlour-maid *announces* Pidduck, *who enters.*)

Blackshaw (*violently*). Now, Pidduck, why in the name of heaven is the meaning of all this?

(Pidduck, *startled, sidles into the nearest chair.* Blackshaw *glares at him, waiting impatiently for an answer.*)

Pidduck. Then you've heard all about it.

Blackshaw. I've not heard all about it. I didn't hear a word until just now. You must be mad to come on such an errand!

PIDDUCK (*hurt*). This is very sudden. I've been accused of many things in my time, but never of being a lunatic.

BLACKSHAW. Anyhow, my answer is No! No! And No!

DORIS. Of course it is!

PIDDUCK (*with dignity*). You don't seem to get any older, Doris.

BLACKSHAW. I can't imagine what you've been dreaming of!

PIDDUCK (*with still more dignity*). I came here as the President of the Association that you used to be President of, and I bring you a unanimous request from the party organisation to stand for Parliament as member for your native constituency. Moreover—

BLACKSHAW (*interrupting him, his sense of humour aroused*). Well, that isn't your Presidential chair, my good friend, and you needn't make a speech. I don't want to hurt your feelings. But you must see that I can never go into politics again.

DORIS. Of course not.

PIDDUCK (*witheringly, to* Doris). And why not?

BLACKSHAW (*obviously anxious to be convinced*). It's not that I'm proud. I'm ruined—politically. I'm finished Besides it's too degrading. Too degrading.

PIDDUCK. Your native constituency may be very misguided, but nevertheless it has always stood up for you through thick and thin. It has always thought you were grossly ill-used. It now offers you, through me, the greatest honour that can be offered to any citizen. (*Throws up his hands; then in a natural, homely, appealing tone to* Mrs. Blackshaw.) Surely he *can't* refuse, Mrs. Blackshaw.

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*placidly*). He won't. He's dying to accept.

BLACKSHAW. Maria, what did you say when I told you I'd renounced politics for ever? You're astoundingly inconsistent, even for you.

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*placidly*). I'm not inconsistent. I always say what you want me to say, because I know it will save trouble in the end.

DART. If you'll pardon me, sir. I think this affair can't be regarded as merely personal. There are other very important considerations.

DORIS. Oh, now you're speechifying too. And what's it got to do with *you*, I should like to know.

DART. Don't be an idiot, for God's sake.

DORIS. I shall be what I like.

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*firmly*). Now I will not have any more of this quarrelling in my house. (*Placidly.*) Mr. Pidduck, I must ask you to excuse them both. They're terribly in love with one another, and I do wish they'd get it over.

DORIS (*absolutely staggered*). Mother!

MRS. BLACKSHAW. Yes, you may well blush. Why shouldn't I speak plainly to Mr. Pidduck? He's seen me smack you many a time—haven't you? (*To* Pidduck.) I never could understand why girls of the present generation should always say just what they don't mean.

DORIS. What do *you* mean?

MRS. BLACKSHAW. I mean, child, that nobody would be more disappointed than you if your father didn't accept. You've been like a lost soul ever since you've had no statistics to prepare for him. And well you know it!

DORIS. Have I! (*To* Dart.) As for you, Edgar, I shall never speak to you again. If *I'd* been in your place, I should have been ashamed to stay on a paper belonging to a man who'd treated father so disgracefully.

DART. I've not stayed on the paper. I put that paragraph in without telling Nathan, and when he saw it this morning he sacked me on the spot.

DORIS (*after a little pause, leaping at him and kissing him*). You dreadful darling!

MRS. BLACKSHAW (*with a calm sigh of relief*). At last!

DART (*to* Doris.) But he had to give me six months' wages in lieu of notice—

BLACKSHAW (*half to himself, absorbed*). I suppose one does belong to the public. (*Then a sudden violent change to vivacity, becoming almost a new being.*) Power! Power! The cure for every disappointment! (*To* Pidduck, *more gaily.*) Now, old friend, what about my election address? We must try again to be honest. Ideals are worth living for. Nothing else is. We must stick to our ideals.

CURTAIN.

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